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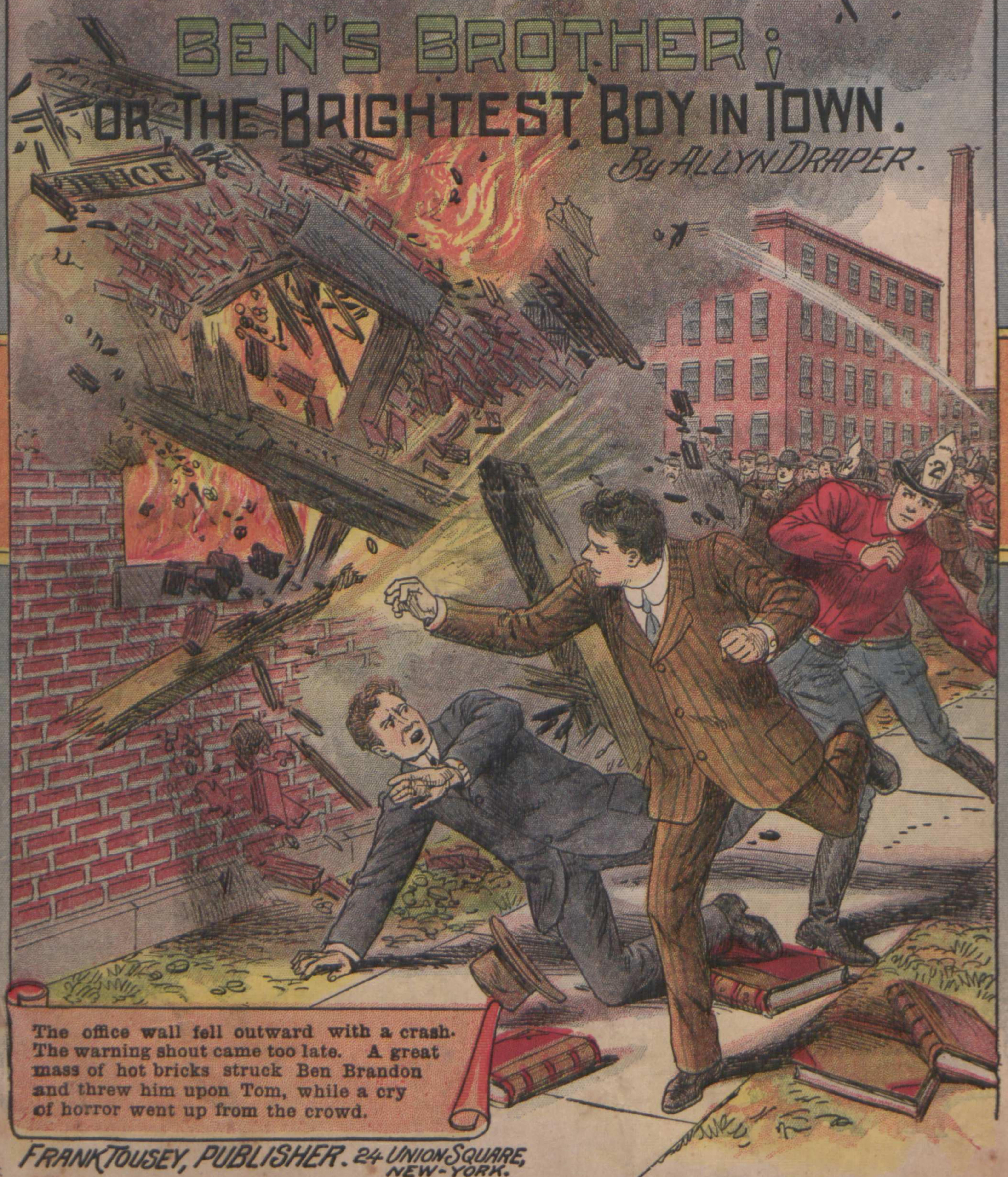
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PLUCK AND LUCK

BEN'S BROTHER;
OR THE BRIGHTEST BOY IN TOWN.

By ALLYN DRAPER.



The office wall fell outward with a crash. The warning shout came too late. A great mass of hot bricks struck Ben Brandon and threw him upon Tom, while a cry of horror went up from the crowd.

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PLUCK AND LUCK

Stories of Adventure.

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BEN'S BROTHER

OR,

THE BRIGHTEST BOY IN TOWN

By Allyn Draper

CHAPTER I.

THE BIGGEST MAN IN TOWN.

Ben's brother wasn't a bit like Ben, except in the matter of looks, and in this particular they were as much alike as two peas.

Ben's brother was given by Ben's father when he was a mere baby to a farmer to be adopted, for at that time the Brandon family were very poor, and afterward both father and mother died and Bent was left in charge of Colonel Mortimer, the banker at Woodville, N. Y., and had now become a very prosperous young man.

Ben was treasurer of the Todd Manufacturing Co., the big mill at Woodville; he was also cashier of the Mortimer National Bank; president of the Woodville Social Club; Master of Hiram Lodge of Freemasonry; overseer of the poor, the head of the Building and Loan Association, and everybody said he was either to be made mayor at the next election or sent to the Assembly—it was not decided which.

Now, all this was a pretty good start for a young man of twenty-two; but when Ben's brother stepped off the train one day at Woodville station, dressed in homespun clothes and carrying his belongings in an antiquated carpet bag, he had nothing but the clothes he stood in—literally, not one cent to his name.

"I wonder what Ben will have to say when he sees me?" the boy murmured, as he looked around at the big mill, the fine common with its tall trees and soldiers' monument and the long row of handsome stores on the main street. "I suppose I ought to have written and told him I was coming, but, then, I haven't heard from him in years. I only hope I shall find him in town; if I don't, I'm sure I don't know what I shall do."

Then Ben's brother started to go into the station to inquire for Ben; but before he could reach the door, a stylishly dressed young fellow clapped him on the back, exclaiming with a hearty laugh:

"By Jove, Ben, what's all this? Been to a masquerade or going to one? Thunder! You look like the member from Oshkosh, or a hayseeder come to town to buy greengoods.

Ha! Ha! Ha! This beats the deck! What do you mean by it? Say?"

Ben's brother turned red from the roots of his hair down to his chin.

"I beg your pardon, sir, but you have evidently made a mistake," he said. "I am not acquainted with you."

"The deuce you ain't! Don't know Charley Kidd? Never played poker with him? Never—but say, it won't wash, Ben. Blest if I can tell what you are driving at, but——"

Ben's brother pulled away and went into the station, slamming the door behind him.

"How much I must look like Ben," he thought. "Dear me! Am I so very country looking? I suppose I must be, but I can't help it. Here goes."

"Can you tell me where Mr. Brandon lives?" he asked at the ticket-office.

The young lady who presided over the pasteboards smiled as she looked at him.

"I should think you ought to know," she said, suppressing a laugh.

"But I don't know, and I'd be much obliged if you would tell me. I am Mr. Brandon's brother. I'm a stranger here in town."

"Oh," said the young lady. "Excuse me! I—you—that is, you look so much alike. I think you will find Mr. Brandon at the mill."

"This mill right here?"

"Yes."

"How do I get in?"

"Go to the office. Everyone knows Mr. Brandon. He is the treasurer—the head man."

"Thank you," said Ben's brother simply. There were tears in his eyes as he turned away, and she pitied him.

But, then, the young lady in the ticket-office did not like Ben.

Ben's brother crossed the tracks and walked up to the mill office and knocked on the door.

Nobody inside paying any attention to him, he knocked

again, and then a third time, after which there was a loud call of:

"Come in! Come in!"

When he entered, Ben's brother was quite overcome by the elegant desks, brass railings and fine carpets.

There was a general titter as the clerks looked up from their big ledgers.

They knew that whoever the stranger might be, it was not Ben, for that individual sat at his desk signing checks, smoking a twenty-five-cent cigar.

His back was turned and he did not look around until he heard a voice ask timidly:

"Is Mr. Brandon in?"

How he stared! How cold and supercilious he looked!

"Did you want to see me?" he asked, without rising.

"I suppose you don't know me, Ben," stammered the boy, feeling as though he would like to be at the bottom of the millrace about that time.

Now, Ben's brother would have liked very much to have answered "no," but he knew perfectly well that it would be of no use.

"I suppose you are Tom," he said. "Step into that room there and shut the door. I'll see you presently. I'm busy now."

Now, this is the way that big mill men often choose to show the importance of their positions. No doubt it was all right from a business standpoint, but it almost broke Tom Brandon's heart.

During the long journey from Hitestown he had been looking forward to this meeting with the brother he could not remember; he had pictured the joyful meeting in a thousand different ways—but never this way! Oh, no!

It grieved him—it angered him—it aroused all the pride in his nature. At first he shed tears, then he determined to get out of town by the first train and go on to New York and seek his fortune; but at last he came to this resolve:

"I'll stay here in Woodville in spite of him. This town is as good for my purpose as any other. I'll show him that I am just as good as he is, and make him respect me in the end."

It took him just half an hour to come to this conclusion, all of which time Ben's brother was waiting for Ben.

At last he came, and his manner was anything but cordial.

"Well, Tom, what brought you here?" he asked, standing, while his brother sat.

Tom Brandon rose slowly. He was perfectly cool now.

"Mr. Duffet is dead, Ben. The farm has passed into other hands. There's nothing to do in Hitestown, so I came down here to see if you couldn't get me a job."

"Humph! Why didn't you write?"

"I thought I'd surprise you."

"Well, you have. I don't see how I can get you a job. Better go to New York."

"No, Ben. I'm going to stay right here in Woodville. They tell me that you are the head man in the mill. Can't you put me to work?"

"No; you are the sort of person we can't use. Besides, I don't choose to have my brother working as a mill hand, and there's no chance in the office."

"Very well. Then I'll go out and look for a job myself."

Tom took up the carpet bag and started for the door.

"Stop!" cried Ben, laying his hand on his arm. "Look here, Tom, this won't do. If you walk through Main street with that thing in your hand, you and I are done with each other forever."

"Are you ashamed of me, Ben?"

"Yes, I am; but let it drop. I'll help you, but I must do it in my own way."

"It belongs to you to help me, Ben. I don't ask much. Only a start. The rest I'll do myself."

Was Ben ashamed of himself as well as of his brother after these manly words were spoken?

Perhaps a little bit. At all events, this ended the discussion. A few moments later Tom got into Ben's stylish buggy and was driven by his brother up on Main street. Ben had resolved to face the music and he did it without wincing, once he began.

First they went to a clothing store and Tom was fitted out in up-to-date style. Then it was to a respectable boarding-house, and a room was engaged; last, Ben went to Mr. Greyson's stationery store and marched in with Tom.

The stationer stared.

"Dear me, Mr. Brandon, this must be a brother of yours," he exclaimed. "My stars, what a close resemblance! Twins?"

"No," said Ben. "There's four years difference between us, but Tom is large for his age. Mr. Greyson, you told me the other day you wanted a clerk. Suppose you try my brother. Later on I shall work him into the mill office, but there's no vacancy there now."

"I should be most happy," replied the stationer. "If he's anything like you, Mr. Brandon, I may not be so willing to let him go."

Then there was talk about terms, and Tom was told to come to business next morning, after which the brothers left the store.

Tom thought that Ben was going to invite him to dinner, as it was now twelve o'clock, but he was soon undeceived.

"Now, look here, Tom," said Ben, "you've got to make your own way as I've made mine in this town. Here's ten dollars and your board is paid for a week. Don't bother me and I won't bother you. Show me what you can do for yourself, and later on I may do more for you. Good-by."

"Good-by, Ben," said Tom steadily. "I'm very much obliged to you. I'll pay back this money and the board bill and the price of the clothes out of my wages—you may count upon that."

"No, you won't," said Ben, coloring slightly, "for I shan't take it," and he walked off, leaving Tom standing in the street.

And as the months passed there were some people in Woodville who declared that Ben's brother has been most handsomely treated by Ben.

"Why," they said, "he came here a poor country boy, and Ben Brandon put him right into business. It's a great thing to have a brother who is the biggest man in town."

CHAPTER II.

THE MAN IN THE BLACK CLOAK.

"Hello, Ben! Where are you off to so early?? We kept it up so late at the club last night, that I didn't expect——"

"Excuse me, Mr. Wiman, but you are not addressing Mr. Ben Brandon," broke in the young man, who had been stopped in front of the Woodville post-office one bright spring morning about a year subsequent to the events narrated in the last chapter, "you have made a mistake."

"Oh, thunder! Ben's brother! Beg pardon! My mistake!"

Stylish Percy Wiman pulled away at once.

There was a big difference in the eyes of Woodville's "400" between Ben and Ben's brother, and yet everybody was making this mistake.

"There it is again, Tom!" exclaimed Jack Ashman, Tom Brandon's room-mate and chum. "It's a big thing to be Ben's brother, and have all the nobs in Woodville speak to you on the street, ain't it? I guess yes."

Just then a handsome carriage rolled up, and the portly gentleman who occupied it called through the window:

"Oh, oh, Brandon! Just a moment! That stock should be sold to-day, and—Ha! Beg your pardon, young man. I took you for your brother. Patrick! Drive on."

"There it goes again! By thunder, I'm tired of it," muttered Tom. "Even Colonel Todd can't tell me from his own treasurer! It's the third time he's done it within a month."

"He's short sighted, anyhow," said Jack. "Well, Tom, now that Greyson is dead and the store is going to be closed, what will you do?"

"I'm blest if I know, Jack. It's a hard blow, but, then, six dollars a week wasn't much, anyhow. I could barely live."

"Of course your brother won't raise a finger to help you?"

"No; you know how we stand, Jack. Not since I have been in Woodville has he ever invited me to call on him. He nods to me on the street, and once in a while he stops and says a word or two, but that's all. Thank Heaven, I don't owe him a dollar, and—thunder! here it is again!"

"Oh, Mr. Brandon! I suppose we shall see you at the lawn party this afternoon? We expect a delightful time, and of course——"

"Pardon me, miss; I am Tom Brandon—not his brother," said the boy, raising his hat to the young lady who had driven the pony phaeton up to the curb.

It was Jennie Todd, the great mill owner's daughter—the richest girl in Woodville. Rumor had it that Ben was engaged to her. It was not the first time she had made this mistake.

Jennie Todd blushed deeply.

"I'm really sorry I can't remember," she said; "but you two do look so much alike. I must ask Ben to bring you to the house and introduce you. Perhaps then I should learn."

Tom blushed up to the eyes.

"Thank you, Miss Todd, I'm afraid I could not come," he replied steadily. "What is more, I doubt very much if my brother would consent."

"Leave that to me," laughed the girl, as she drove the pony away.

"Phew!" cried Jack. "If you don't want to be mistaken for your brother, don't dress like him, Tom. But I must be off to work. See you later, old man."

"I'll dress like him as long as it suits me," muttered Tom; "and what's more, Jennie Todd shall invite me to Highlands, not because I'm Ben's brother, but because I'm myself."

Here was the Brandon pride which spoke. It was Tom's little bit of revenge to imitate his brother's dress, and yet, strange to say, nothing annoyed him so much as to be mistaken for Ben, something which happened almost every time he showed himself on the street.

But there was no business in this, and Tom was out for business that day. Greyson, the stationer, was dead, and the place was to be sold out. Positions for gentlemanly young clerks were not plenty in Woodville. Tom had made the rounds of all the stores and, being now well known in town as a bright, active fellow, would have stood every chance of securing employment if there had been any vacancy, but there was none.

A week passed and still it was the same. Room rent was due, the board bill, the washing bill and other expenses had to be met. Funds were getting low, and still not a word from Ben, who knew, of course, how matters stood.

"How are you, Tom?" was all he would say when by chance they met on the street.

Rather than ask Ben for help, Tom would have cut off his right hand.

Two weeks passed. Still no change. Funds were getting lower still.

"You'll have to go to your brother, Tom," said Jack one morning as they were dressing in their room. "I heard Mrs. Gulligar say last night that if your share of the rent wasn't paid soon we'd both have to quit, for she has a chance to rent the room."

"Let her rent it, Jack. She'll give you the small one at the end of the hall, and I'll get out."

"Pshaw! Pocket your pride and go to your brother. I'm sure he'll help you, Tom."

"Not I! I'll die first—and I won't leave Woodville, either."

"Then, what will you do? Things can't go on so."

"Wait and see," said Tom, leaving the room hurriedly.

Jack felt sorry for Tom; but as he was only a mill hand at five dollars a week, he could not help him.

But Tom did not want his help.

A plan had been hatching in his mind for several days, and the time had now come to try its workings. Tom hurried down to the Central House and, entering the office, bade the proprietor good morning.

"Good morning, Mr. Brandon," said the landlord, bowing politely. "This is a beautiful morning. What can I do for you—what's that? Mr. Brandon's brother? Oh, excuse me. Well, Tom, how does it go? By time, I can never tell you from your brother."

"Not very lively, Mr. Parfitt, but it's going to be better."

"Struck anything yet?"

"No. I'm going to strike it though."

"That's the way to talk. I should think your brother might make a place for you in the mill."

"I want to make a place for myself, Mr. Parfitt. I'm getting tired of being Ben's brother in this town. I think I can make people know me and I'm going to try."

"That's manly, Tom. If I can help——"

"You can."

"How? I've no money to lend."

"What's the rent of that old building of yours up the street?"

"Why, it's twenty dollars, Tom, but——"

"Can you trust me?"

"For what?"

"The rent till I can pay you."

"But the business?"

"Bicycle repairs, buying and selling wheels, teaching beginners to ride—anything and everything in the wheel line."

"Blest if I don't think such a shop would succeed, Tom," said the landlord. "If you'd given it any other name, I should have said no—but how are you going to get your start?"

"I've got it."

"What do you mean?"

"You know Ed Daley?"

"The drunken scoundrel—yes! He ruined my daughter's wheel. He won't be much opposition to you, Tom."

"He'll be none at all, for Mr. Brooker had a chattel mortgage on his tools and stuff, and has foreclosed it. Daley left town last night."

"And you've bought his plant?"

"Yes—on time."

"But the building is coming down where Daley's place is."

"I know it. That's why I want your store. I'm something of a mechanic, Mr. Parfitt, and——"

"And a bright fellow always, Tom. I believe you'll make it go. Here, take the store—two months' rent for nothing. No, you sha'n't start with a bigger debt than you have to. I won't take your note. Go in, my boy, and win. Show that big brother of yours what kind of stuff you are made of. I like to see a fellow in these days who ain't ashamed to work with his hands."

Now this was the way Ben's brother got into business in Woodville, and it gave great offense to Ben.

Tom had seen Mr. Brooker before going to Mr. Parfitt and he had agreed to let him have the use of the tools and old wheels which had been taken for debt. Next day Tom moved the stuff into the little store, and put up a sign, reading:

T. BRANDON,

Bicycle Repairs. Instruction given on the wheel.

Beside this he put in a few cigars, bottled soda water and birch beer. He hung a few cheap pictures on the walls and made the place as bright and cheerful as possible.

The day he moved in he put on a pair of old trousers and rolled up his sleeves and went to work. No more dressing like Ben or posing as a gentlemanly clerk.

There was lots of bicycle riding in Woodville, and a great demand for second-hand wheels from the mill people, who had but little money to spend.

"If you don't do a big business from the start, Tom, I miss my guess," declared Jack Ashman. "I'll take you up in the mill and send you all the trade I can; but what will your brother say?"

"What do I care?" laughed Tom. "I'm going to work whether Ben likes it or not."

Tom gave up his share of the room and put up a cot-bed in the back shop.

The first day's business opened well. Four wheels came in to be repaired, and in the evening Tom sold three of the second-hand wheels in stock and traded two others, besides which there was quite a little business done in "pop" and cigars from the young fellows who dropped in to talk bicycle and see what Tom was about.

Next day it was not quite as good, but the week averaged up fairly well.

Tom found that he had cleared about twenty dollars, besides having enough to pay Mr. Brooker for the old wheels disposed of, which that individual considered clear gain.

It was eleven o'clock when Tom closed up that Saturday night, but he could not rest until he had been around to Mr. Brooker's with the money, knowing that he should find him open, for his place was the principal meat market in town.

"Good for you, Tom," said the butcher. "I like your way of doing business. Keep it going, and if you want any money come to me. Ah, Mr. Brandon, what can I do for you to-night?"

It was Ben.

He had just come out of the club, where, so it was said, a pretty stiff game of poker was played on Saturday nights, and, seeing Tom, entered the shop.

"You can't do anything for me, Brooker," replied the mill treasurer superciliously. "I want to see my brother, that's why I came in. Just step out here, Tom."

Tom followed Ben out through the side door on to Bank street.

"What in hunder have you been doing?" he demanded fiercely. "What's all this I hear?"

"Trying to make a living, Ben," replied the boy, looking at him steadily as they stood together under the electric light.

"Trying to disgrace me, you mean! Do you suppose I want my brother keeping a place like yours, patching up old wheels and peddling out pop and bad cigars? Why didn't you come to me if you were in trouble. I'd have helped you out, you know that."

"Ben," said Tom quietly, "I came to you for help once. If I was starving, I'd never come again. Stop! Don't ask me why! You know well enough. You're a big man, Ben, and I'm a very little one. No; I won't leave Woodville! The place suits me. I'll show these people that Tom Brandon

can repair a bicycle well, that he sells a good cigar, and does business on the square; and look here, Ben, you're my brother, and if the tide should ever turn don't hesitate to come to me for help, for I'll never go back on you as you have done on me."

Whereupon Tom walked off down Bank street and was gone.

Now, do not suppose that Mr. Ben Brandon allowed his brother to make this fiery speech without interruption.

Nothing of the sort!

But Tom got in every word he had to say just the same.

He was burning with indignation when he tore himself away, and when he turned into School street, which was entirely dark, intending to keep on around the block, he could scarcely contain himself, for the boy has just as much of the Brandon pride about him as Ben.

He had not gone a hundred yards on School street, when a man, enveloped in a black coat, suddenly sprang out from the shadow of the high school wall and stood in his path.

"Hold on, Brandon!" he whispered. "You can't dodge me! I tell you, man, if that money isn't forthcoming by noon to-morrow, ruin stares us in the face! Don't think to escape! You are as deep in the mud as I am in the mire, and—great Heavens! Ben's brother! Take that, you snoozer! Why didn't you speak?"

Suddenly the man drew a blackjack from under his cloak and aimed a furious blow at Tom, but the boy was quick enough to dodge and, waiting for no further developments, ran down School street like a deer.

CHAPTER III.

THE FIRE AT THE MILL.

Tom never stopped running until he was out on Main street, having run around into Common street and so on up the hill.

But he was not followed.

Looking back when he came into the light, he could see nothing of the man in the black cloak.

"Ben's getting himself into trouble," thought Tom. "It's that poker game at the club, and they say he's deep in stock speculation, too. What ought I to do? Tell him? I suppose I ought, but, then, he wouldn't listen. Ben, oh, Ben!"

At that very moment Ben strode past him—Tom had not noticed until he was by.

He did not even turn his head at his brother's call, but, not heeding this, Tom hurried on to his side.

"Ben, I want to speak to you a minute," he said in a low voice. "It's something very important indeed."

"I don't know you," snarled Ben. "Don't you even speak to me again!"

Tom fell back, stung to the quick.

He would have liked to have taken his brother at his word, but his conscience wouldn't let him. Next morning he called at the mill, but Ben had gone to New York and was not expected back until the five o'clock train.

It was a busy day for Tom. Three wheels came in for repairs during the morning, and at half-past twelve he sold an old wheel to a mill boy for fifteen dollars—a bargain, for the tires were perfectly sound, and Tom had painted and polished the wheel until it was as good as new.

At half-past twelve a stranger on a fine wheel stopped at his place and wanted to borrow a pump.

Tom pumped up his tire for him and refused to take any pay. Then the wheelman bought a dollar's worth of cigars and looked thoughtfully around the little shop.

"Look here, why don't you take the agency for our wheel?" he asked. "I represent the Buffalo Bicycle Co. It's a good wheel and sells well, and we do the right thing by our agents."

"Do you trust them without security?" laughed Tom.

"Sometimes we do," replied the man, "when we find they are the right sort and have good backers; but I'm only a drummer. I'll have to consult my firm. I'm in this town to make an agent, though, and I like your looks, Mr. Brandon. By the way, are you anything to the treasurer of the Todd mills?"

"Brother," replied Tom shortly.

"If he'll guarantee your account for a thousand dollars, it's as good as done."

"I wouldn't ask him to guarantee it for one cent," said Tom emphatically. "You can inquire about me of Mr. Brooker, the butcher, or you can inquire at the hotel, but there'll be no guarantee business done."

"I'll see you later," said the drummer, and he mounted his wheel and rode away.

But the afternoon passed and he did not return, so Tom came to the conclusion that the matter was off.

At five o'clock Tom was busy repairing a wheel for a young lady who had broken down on the road, but by half-past he had finished, and, leaving a boy to mind the shop, he sprang upon a shabby, old wheel which he had been riding himself occasionally and started for the mill.

"It's the last time I'll try," he thought, "and if this don't go I'll write Ben. Heavens! What's that fellow about! He'll run head-first into Miss Todd, as sure as fate!"

It was done almost as Tom spoke the words.

A clumsy wheelman was trying to cross in front of Miss Jennie Todd's pony phaeton as that young lady was driving rapidly along Main street.

Tom saw a jumble of wheel, wheelman and horse, and then the frightened pony ran the wheel of the phaeton up against one of the stone posts of the Common fence and overturned the vehicle.

Jennie was thrown forward and would have been dashed head-first against the iron railing if Tom, quick as a flash, had not sprang from his wheel and caught her in his arms.

The pony stopped—he had never dreamed of running away.

Tom placed the trembling girl on her feet and turned to pick up his fallen wheel.

"Oh, thank you, Mr. Brandon!" exclaimed Jennie. "I shall never forget this. Papa will call on you and thank you, too. If you had been one second less quick than you were, I should be in sad trouble now."

Tom raised his hat politely.

"I'm not Mr. Brandon, Miss Todd," he said. "I'm only Mr. Brandon's brother. Don't mistake me for Ben."

"I could hardly do that, when here comes Ben," smiled the girl, as Ben came bursting through the crowd which was beginning to collect.

"What's this? Has my brother been running into you, Jennie?" he demanded angrily. "By gracious, if he has, I——"

"Now—now, Ben! Don't be in such a hurry! Your brother has just saved my head, and, perhaps, my life. Introduce me to him if you please. It's not the first time I've asked you, and I sha'n't ask again."

"Nonsense!" said Ben haughtily. "You don't want to know him. Here, let me help you into the carriage. Get out of the way. Why do you stand staring there, Tom?"

"Ben, I must speak to you alone just for a moment," whispered Tom. "It's a matter that deeply concerns you, I——"

Now, Ben did not actually strike Tom. He hardly would have dared to do that before the crowd.

But he brushed him aside roughly, and, seizing Jennie by the arm, almost forced her into the phaeton.

It was too much for Tom.

He sprang upon his wheel and rode away.

"He must paddle his own canoe and I'll paddle mine," he thought, when he found himself back in the shop.

But in the bottom of his heart he felt more anxious than angry. He felt that there was trouble in the wind for Ben.

That evening the agent of the Buffalo Bicycle Co. called again.

"I had to run down to Lyndhurst," he said, "but I stopped on the way to see Brooker. He gave you a fine send-off. I think you can have the agency all right. I shall be back in Buffalo by the last of the week, and you may expect to hear from us by Tuesday or Wednesday. If we decide to let you handle our wheels, we'll send on a few samples, and you can take right hold."

"I'll do my best, Mr. ——"

"Sammis is my name," said the agent. "Here's my card. I feel sure you'll do a good trade, or I shouldn't recommend you. We want hustlers, and I think you are one."

Tom felt proud and happy when he closed up his little shop that night.

Still he was worried about Ben, and he went out on the street to see if he could not meet him. He would have gone to his rooms, but never having been invited there, he felt too proud to do that. Besides, he felt that it was more than likely that Ben was at the club, for there were lights in the upper windows of the Central Block, which, to the initiated, meant that the usual poker game was going on.

But he saw nothing of Ben and after a while he gave it up and started over the bridge, and took a long walk on the Lyndhurst road.

If his thoughts ran on Jennie Todd, who can blame him? A cat can look at a king, and a bicycle mender has a perfect right to think of a mill owner's daughter, provided he thinks no wrong of her, which Tom certainly did not of Jennie Todd.

Tom walked further than he intended, and it was almost one o'clock when he found himself passing the office of the Todd mills on his way back.

As he came along he saw a curious light flashing from the windows across the road.

"Can anybody be working nights in the office?" thought Tom. "Can it be Ben?"

Here was an idea—perhaps it meant a chance to speak to his brother, and Tom hurried on.

There ought to have been a watchman at the mill gate, but Tom saw none. What he did see was a glare of light inside the office. Flames were shooting up among the desks.

"Heavens! The place is all on fire!" gasped Tom.

He ran to the first window and peered in.

Then, all in the same instant, the door of the mill office flew open, and a man carrying three heavy books under his arm came stealing out.

Instantly Tom recognized the man in the black cloak.

"Ben's enemy!" flashed over him. "He's fired the mill office and stolen the books."

Tom was as quick to act as he was to think.

With one bound he sprang upon the man and dealt him a blow between the eyes which sent the books flying and the man sprawling upon the ground.

"Blast you, Brandon! What are you about?" hissed the man, springing to his feet. "Heavens! It's Ben's brother again!"

"Help! Help! Fire! Fire!" yelled Tom, hoping that they might hear him at the station.

And so they did.

Men came running to the scene.

But they were too late to save Tom from a crushing blow dealt by that same blackjack, and all too late to save the mill office, which was soon a sea of fire inside the walls.

The man in the black cloak made his escape around the

angle of the mill wall, but as there was no time to pick up the books, he left them behind him.

When Tom came to himself there was a crowd about him, and Ben was bending over him.

"He's all right now," said the mill treasurer. "Leave him to me, gentlemen. I've sent for my carriage. I'll take him home."

This was for the crowd, but it touched Tom's heart.

"Oh, Ben! I saved the books anyhow," he gasped, for he saw them lying beside him on the ground.

"Yes, you little fool! But you've ruined me!" hissed Ben.

He raised his hand threateningly, and Tom thought he was going to strike him.

At the same instant the office wall fell outward with a crash.

The warning shout came too late.

A great mass of hot bricks struck Ben Brandon and threw him down upon Tom, while a cry of horror went up from the crowd.

CHAPTER IV.

THE LITTLE RED BOOK.

Everybody thought it was all up with Tom Brandon when the wall of the burning mill office came crashing down upon him and Ben.

And so it would undoubtedly have been but for one fortunate occurrence which, when Tom came to think of it afterwards, seemed almost a miracle.

There was a big Gothic window in the end wall of the office—the building was an old one and had been used as a chapel before the mill corporation bought it.

The heavy frame of this window, all ablaze on the inside, fell against the big elm tree near which Ben and Tom Brandon stood—and there remained, the shower of hot bricks parting on either side of it.

This saved the Brandons when everybody thought their end had come.

Amid the cheers of the crowd Tom and Ben walked out unharmed.

The crowd pressed about them, Ben being the center of attraction, for there was no denying that he was very popular among the mill hands, and with the Woodville people generally.

There was a scramble to rescue the books from under the burning window frame.

Nobody paid any attention to Tom, and he thought it a good time to pull out and go home.

He felt terribly chagrined and troubled. Where he supposed he was doing a "big thing," and something which would put his brother under lasting obligations to him, Ben had made him feel that exactly the opposite was the case.

"Didn't he want the mill books saved?" thought Tom bitterly, as he walked toward his little shop. "That man took me for Ben again. What did his remark mean? It can't be possible that Ben told him to set the office on fire."

It was a terrible thought, and yet it would force its way into Tom's mind.

Country bred though he was, and wholly unused to the ways of the world, he could not shut his eyes to the fact that his brother's conduct was very peculiar, to say the least.

"Well, it's none of my business, as Ben says," thought Tom. "He's given me the cold shoulder, and I can't help him after this."

These were the boy's thoughts when he turned in behind the little bicycle shop that night, but by morning he was the same old Tom again, generous, free-hearted and true, and just as anxious about his brother as ever.

Ben's brother was a very different sort of fellow from Ben.

Curiosity sent Tom down to the mill before cooking his breakfast on the little stove in the back room.

The fire had been confined to the office and promptly extinguished.

There were a few men standing about the ruins, mill hands out early to see the sight. They recognized Tom and nodded to him, but did not speak.

Tom walked over to the big elm tree against which the half-burned window frame was still leaning, and surveyed the spot where his life had been so wonderfully preserved.

As he stood there his eye fell upon something red just visible under the mass of bricks. He stooped down and pulled out a little book bound in red leather. It was badly singed on the covers, but its leaves were all right. Tom saw that it was an account book, and that the entries in it related to the affairs of the mill.

"This ought to go to Ben or Mr. Todd," he thought. "It may be important. Still, I don't care to keep it. I don't want to give Ben the chance to jump on me again."

At first he thought of handing it to one of the mill men and asking him to deliver it to his brother; but they were rough fellows, and he concluded not to do it, so he put it in his pocket and went back to the shop, intending to hand the book to his brother in case he met him on the street, or to send it down to the mill later in the day.

When he reached the shop he threw his coat over the back of an old sofa, which Mr. Parfitt had kindly lent him to help furnish his little room, and started to get breakfast ready.

He ran out and bought some eggs, and had just got two started in the frying-pan when a stylish team dashed up to the shop, and out jumped Ben.

"Hello!" thought Tom, "something's up, or Ben would never come here."

Leaving the eggs to take care of themselves, he hurried into the shop, meeting his brother at the door.

Ben's face looked pale and drawn. Tom caught a whiff of his breath and knew that he had been drinking.

He expected trouble, and yet Ben addressed him in a more friendly way than he had ever done before.

"Tom, I am sorry for what I said to you last night," he began hurriedly. "You meant all right, and I was too hasty. I want to thank you for what you tried to do."

Tears came into Tom's eyes.

"It's all right, Ben. I only tried to do my best," he said. "Of course, I naturally supposed——"

"That I wanted the mill books saved. Of course I did. You misunderstood me when you thought I didn't. I saw that, but it was no time to correct the wrong impression you got into your head then. I want you to tell me all about it, and do it quick, for I've got to go to New York by the next train, and—and you had something to tell me the other day, and you can tell it now. Let it all out, Tom. I don't want you to think that I—but go on. Say what you have to say."

While Tom told his story, Ben listened in silence. Somehow the little red book was forgotten. Tom was thinking most of the mysterious unknown in the black cloak just then.

"I can't imagine who that fellow can be or what he means," said Ben, after Tom had finished. "He is some lunatic evidently. I shall put a detective on his track and see if we can't ferret him out, but I've got my own opinion just the same."

"There's no doubt he set the fire at the mill, Ben."

"Not the least in the world, but his saying that I told him to do it is all nonsense—looks like an attempt at blackmail. Of course I needn't tell you that to talk about this might do me a good deal of harm."

"I shall never mention it to a living soul, Ben."

"That's right. I'll look into the matter and let you know

how it comes out. By the way, how are you making out here?"

"First rate."

"Glad of it! But it won't do, Tom. I can't have my brother keeping a tinker's shop and selling ginger pop and cigars. It will ruin me. I'm going to look you up a good position in New York this very day. Of course you'll take it to oblige me."

"No, Ben."

"But you must! It's a disgrace to have you here so, and there's nothing I can do for you in the mill."

"I'm satisfied. I'm making a living, and Woodville suits me well enough. I'd be lost in the city. No, Ben, I tell you now, flatfooted, you can't run me out of town."

"Who's trying to run you out of town?" demanded Ben, angrily. "Wait till you see what I have to offer before you decide. By the way, did you happen to see anything of a little memorandum book bound in red leather among those other books last night?"

He ought to have asked the question before, for Tom's pride was thoroughly aroused now. All his old suspicions were back again. It was well enough for Ben to talk about blackmail and detectives, but he had not explained how the safe in the mill office came to be open without which the mysterious unknown never could have got out the books.

"What do you want to know for?" demanded Tom. "If I found such a book it belongs to Mr. Todd and not to you, Ben."

Ben's face grew as black as night.

"Tom Brandon, you've got that book!" he hissed. "Do you want to ruin me? Give it up! Give it up, I say, or by Heaven, I——"

He checked himself suddenly and broke out with a short laugh.

"Come, let's have the book, Tom," he said, coaxingly. "Of course it's Mr. Todd's property, but I'm the mill treasurer, and all the books are in my charge. There's only a few memorandums in it, and if you gave it to him he would hand it right over to me."

"You shall have it, Ben," said Tom, quietly, "but let me say one word."

"Say it quick, then, for I've got to make the train, and I must have that book when I get to New York."

"You shall have it, but let this end it, Ben Brandon. I'm your brother, but I'm no fool. Look out for yourself after this, and if trouble comes don't blame me. What's more don't bother me. I'm satisfied with my business. I'm going to stay right here in Woodville. I'm going to show these people that I'm somebody besides Ben's brother. I'm going to show them that I'm an honest boy and bright enough to make my own way in spite of my rich relations. You can just mark it down that I ask no odds of you or anybody else."

"Very fine," sneered Ben. "You are a wonderful young man, but there are other honest people in Woodville besides yourself, and if you weren't my brother I——"

"What! What would you do, Ben Brandon?"

Tom looked fierce, then.

The Brandon temper was all aroused.

"Nothing," said Ben, shortly. "Tom, give me that book."

Tom walked over to the sofa and felt in the pocket of his coat, but the little red book was not to be found.

"Tain't here," he muttered. "Could any one have come in an' taken it while I was out buying the eggs?"

"What! What!" gasped Ben, turning deathly pale. "Was it in your pocket? Is it gone?"

"Yes."

"Great Heavens! If any one has taken it I'm a ruined

man! Look behind the sofa, it may have dropped out of your pocket."

Tom pulled the sofa away from the wall, but the book was not there.

"You are lying to me!" cried Ben, furiously. "You've got that book, Tom Brandon! You don't mean to give it up!"

"Liar yourself!" shouted Tom. "There's something crooked about this, Ben, and you know it! If it was anybody else but you—keep your hands off me, Ben Brandon! I don't want to hurt my brother, but——"

Ben had aimed a furious blow at him, which Tom dodged.

Again he sprang at Tom, and there might have been trouble, but just at that instant the door was darkened, and there stood Col. Todd—the great Todd! Woodville's millionaire!

"What's this, Brandon? What's this?" he exclaimed. "Brothers squabbling? This won't do at all. Come, come, I want you down at the mill. We can't come to any understanding how matters are without your help. By the way, Master Tom, my girl has a wheel that's out of order. I wish you'd take a run up to my place this morning and see what's the matter with it; they tell me you are all right when it comes to repairing a wheel."

"I'll go, sir," replied Tom, quietly. "Repairing wheels is my business."

"Just so. Much obliged to you for saving my books last night. We should have been in a pretty pickle if they had been burned. How in thunder do you suppose the safe came to be open, Brandon? There's no evidence that it has been tampered with. What are these, cigars? Good for anything? Well, you may give me a dollar's worth. Thank you. Come on, Brandon. We've got our hands full to-day."

They were gone, and Tom Brandon stood staring after them with the dollar bill in his hand.

"By gracious, I'm sorry," he murmured. "I mustn't go back on him—we are both Brandons, but just now I'd sooner be Ben's brother than Ben."

CHAPTER V.

MAKING NEW CUSTOMERS.

Tom thought fast during the next fifteen minutes.

The sum total of his reflections may be given in five words. "I'll mind my own business."

It was a very sensible conclusion to come to under the circumstances.

But do not imagine Tom Brandon reached it without making a thorough search for the little red book.

It was not to be found. There was absolutely no trace of it. Bitterly Tom regretted having left the store alone even for a moment.

He felt sure that someone must have sneaked in and searched his pockets during his absence, and he felt equally certain that the person who did it must have been the mysterious unknown who had fired the mill.

To say that Tom was not terribly worried about it all would be far from the truth, but he shook it off bravely and went right to work.

There were two wheels promised for ten o'clock, and the boy put them in good shape and had them all ready before Percy Wiman and Charley Kidd, leading lights in the Woodville Wheel Club, called in to get them.

Tom charged them a dollar and a half each, and after trying the wheels they declared themselves highly pleased.

"Are they all right?" replied Wiman. "You don't do much for the Wheel Club, do you?"

"You are the first club members I've worked for," answered Tom.

"That so? Well, you'll hear more from us. Say, they tell me you are Ben Brandon's brother. Is that a fact?"

"My name is Tom Brandon," was the proud reply. "If I do any work all right, it don't make a pin's difference whose brother I am."

"That's what's the matter," laughed Charley Kidd. "Come on, Perce. We've got to be off. Brandon, you'll hear from the club before long. We've been wanting just such a fellow as you in town for over a year."

Off they went spinning up Main street, and Tom calling in the boy who usually tended store for him in his absence, spruced himself up the best he could and started for Highlands, as Colonel Todd's palatial residence was called.

As he rode between the great stone pillars at the gate on his shabby old wheel, the lodge-keeper came out and touched his hat with a respectful "Good morning, Mr. Brandon," and with such a surprised look on his face, that it made Tom's blood boil.

"He takes me for Ben," he thought. "He's wondering if I've gone crazy to ride a back number wheel like this. No matter. Give me time and I'll have a wheel as good as the best of them. I wonder if I'm going to see Miss Jennie Todd."

This was the one thought which overshadowed all others. Pretty Jennie Todd had been a prominent figure in Tom's mind ever since the affair at the Common.

Sure enough there she was out to meet him.

"Oh, Mr. Brandon, I'm so glad to see you!" she exclaimed. "I've got an engagement to go up Overtop mountain this afternoon, and, of course, we have to ride most of the way, and now my chain is broken. Can you fix it without taking the wheel away? I made papa promise to stop and tell you about it this morning, and I s'pose he did. If you can do it I shall never forget you, and it won't be the only obligation I'm under to you, not by a good deal."

"How she rattles on," thought Tom, "but she's as pretty as a picture. Wonder if there is any chance of our meeting her on Overtop this afternoon?"

He did not tell Jennie that he had made an engagement with Jack Ashman, who happened to be out of the mill nursing a sprained wrist, but making a respectful reply, asked for the wheel.

"It's right in the hall here," replied Jennie; "won't you step in?"

Tom examined the wheel, and found the break nothing worse than a rivet gone.

"Why, I can fix that in five minutes," he said. "You see I've brought my kit of tools along."

"I was sure you could," laughed Jennie, "but I should have had to send it to the city if you hadn't been on hand. I think it is real nice to have a bicycle mender in town, and I'm going to send you lots of business."

She kept on talking while Tom put in the new rivet, and then asked what there was to pay.

"That will be twenty-five cents," said Tom, quietly. It had been on his tongue's end to say "nothing," but his sense of dignity told him that it would not do.

"Nonsense!" cried Jennie. "It's worth a dollar at least. Don't say a word, Mr. Brandon. I won't take the change."

Tom quietly laid three quarters on the hall table.

"Much obliged," he said. "I shall be glad to do any jobs you may send me, Miss Todd. Good-morning."

"Won't you come in and rest yourself?" asked Jennie, blushing. "I want you to meet my mother. We are so well acquainted with your brother that——"

"No, Miss Todd," interrupted Tom, firmly. "My brother and I are very different persons. I don't travel on my relationship to him. Good-morning."

He was entirely too much for Jennie. She said no more but stood on the piazza watching Tom as he went spinning down the board walk toward the gate.

"I'll make him call on me," she murmured. "He's ten thousand times more of the gentleman than Ben Brandon ever dared to be, and as for his being nothing but a mechanic what do I care for that? Didn't my father begin as a bobbin boy in the Woodville mill?"

And having given utterance to these highly democratic sentiments, Jennie Todd turned and went into the house.

Meanwhile Tom went spinning on toward town thinking—if we may be allowed to expose his thoughts—that he had never seen such a charming girl as Jennie Todd.

He was just rounding the corner into Pleasant street, when two men sprang out from the shadow of the high stone wall which surrounded Col. Todd's estate.

One was a well dressed but dissipated looking young man, the other, a rough looking fellow with an ugly scowl on his face.

"Brandon! Brandon!" called the former. "For Heaven's sake stop! I *must* speak to you a minute!"

He would have thrown himself in the way of Tom's wheel had not the other caught his arm and pulled him back.

"You fool!" he hissed. "That ain't Ben. It's Ben's brother, the bicycle tinker. Can't you see?"

The man uttered a suppressed exclamation, and both started off on the run along the line of the wall.

CHAPTER VI.

THE ADVENTURE ON OVERTOP.

"By thunder, I'll know what this means!" thought Tom, and he turned his wheel along the wall, shouting to the two men to stop.

They saw him coming and were evidently as determined as Tom himself, for, seeing no other means of escape, both caught the top of the wall and pulled themselves over.

In a moment they were lost among the trees and shrubbery of Hyland Park.

"What *does* it mean?" muttered Tom, springing off his wheel. "Shall I follow them? No; I'll stick to my resolution and mind my own business. Anyhow, I can do nothing for Ben."

But he kept wondering all the way back to the shop whether or not one of those two might have the missing red book about him, and he half wished that he had not given it up so easily.

At one o'clock Jack Ashman came into the shop.

"Going up the mountain this afternoon, Tom?" he asked.

"You bet. I've promised myself a holiday and I'm going to take it. Besides, there's really nothing to do."

"Oh, you'll have all you want to do before long," replied Jack. "Everybody is talking about the convenience of having a fellow like you in town. But I say, Tom, that was a big thing you did last night. It ought to make you awfully solid with Ben."

"I don't want to be solid with him," growled Tom, "and I don't want to talk about it, either. We'll drop both Ben and business, Jack, and just go off for a good time."

It was a beautiful afternoon, clear, calm and cool, and not a cloud in the sky; an ideal day for mountain climbing.

Tom had been promising himself a trip up Overtop ever since he came to Woodville, but it was five miles to the base of the peak, and somehow he could never spare the time.

"We'll ride to Herman the Hermit's," said Jack, "and for the rest of the way we'll have to be content with shank's mare."

"Who's Herman the Hermit?"

"Oh, he's a strange old fellow who lives along on the mountain with his dogs. Haven't you ever seen him? He comes into town once in a while."

"Never have to know him."

"Oh, he dresses in a coat made of old carpet, and always carries a big bag over his shoulder."

"I've seen that man lots of times, but I never knew who he was."

"If you did you'd know more than anybody else knows. My father told me that Herman the Hermit was an old man when he was a boy, so he must be near a hundred now. He keeps about twenty dogs, and I tell you what, they are dangerous, but I know the old man well, so we have nothing to fear."

Of course Tom's curiosity was aroused, but when they reached the hermit's hut, there was neither dogs nor man to be found.

"The old fellow is off hunting," said Jack. "We'll leave our wheels here and travel on afoot."

It was a tremendous climb. Overtop Peak rose to a height of fully five hundred feet above the level of the hermit's hut.

Tom stood it well, however, and, as for Jack, he was an old hand at mountain climbing.

The ascent was up a rough, stony path, which went winding in and out among the ledges for the distance of a mile or more, always rising until it terminated abruptly under the big granite door of the mountain.

Beyond this it was one grand scramble up over the rocks to the lookout point, about a hundred feet above the narrow ledge, where the path ended.

"Say, Jack," remarked Tom, as they approached this ledge, "we are going to have a sweet time getting up on those rocks. Can it really be done?"

"Of course it can."

"But look at them—they are almost up and down, with nothing but a few stunted pine trees to help a fellow along."

"Can't help that, Tom; I've been up there once, and I reckon I can go again, although I'm not quite sure that this is the point we went up from. I am thinking that we ought to have turned to the right after we left the path."

"Instead of that, we turned to the left."

"Exactly; let's keep on, though. We'll make it somehow, and if we find the rocks impassable, of course, we can go back."

"What's that?" exclaimed Tom, suddenly, as they turned a projecting point of rocks.

It sounded very much like a cry in a woman's voice, and seemed to come from up on the side of the dome.

Before Jack could say a word the deep baying of a dog was heard, immediately followed by the barking of many others.

"It's Herman the Hermit, or anyhow, it's his dogs!" exclaimed Jack.

"Go, Mr. Wiman! Leave me here and go!" the voice suddenly cried out again.

"By gracious, look there!" cried Tom, at the same instant, and he pointed up on the side of the dome, where a young girl stood clinging to a narrow ledge perhaps fifty feet above them.

"Jennie Todd!" exclaimed Jack. "Hang me if it ain't!"

It was certainly the colonel's daughter, and equally certain was it that her position was most perilous.

Again the barking of the dogs was heard, and as the boys pressed forward they saw Percy Wiman, as pale as death, with his right arm hanging limply by his side, hurrying toward them.

"Save her! Save her?" he gasped out. "The hermit's dogs

are after us! Great Heavens, get her down off that rock if you can. I've broken my arm and can't do a thing."

Tom pulled off his hat and waved it.

"Miss Todd! Miss Todd! Stand firm! We'll help you," he shouted. "Look up! Don't look down!"

"You can never do it!" cried Jack. "No living man can get up there."

"Well, I came down all right," groaned Percy Wiman. "The dogs were after us, and we managed to get down to that ledge, when I lost my footing and tumbled over. You see the result. My arm is broken. Thank Heaven, Jennie was able to hold on."

He pointed to his arm ruefully, and leaned against the rock looking sick and faint.

"Don't risk your life, Brandon," he gasped. "There are three of us now, and one better go down the mountain for help. I don't believe the dogs can get her there. That's what she wanted me to do in the first place, but I was afraid to leave her."

"I can't promise to get her down but I can get up all right," cried Tom, "and then I can get her back on to the rocks above."

"If you can do that there's an easy way down on the other side. I was made to try it here."

"You can never do it, Tom!" cried Jack. "Let me up the other way. I ain't afraid of the dogs, and more than likely Herman the Hermit is up there."

But Tom had already thrown off his coat and hat and was ready for the climb.

"Oh, Mr. Brandon, don't try it!" called Jennie. "Go down and get help. I'm not afraid of the dogs here. Go and let me stay till you return."

"Keep cool! I'm coming!" called Tom.

His only thought was to rescue Jennie Todd from her perilous position.

Planting his feet firmly in a crevice in the rock and getting hold of a projection above, he managed to pull himself up until he could reach a small pine which clung to the side of the ledge.

It was a desperate undertaking, but Tom persevered.

Jack Ashman and Percy Wiman held their breath as they watched him.

As for Jennie she did not dare to look.

Little by little Tom worked his way upward, when one misstep or the slightest loosening of his hold would have sent him whirling down to death perhaps, for it was only by a miracle that young Wiman had escaped going over the lower ledge, down on to the rocks a hundred feet below.

"By Jove, he's done it!" cried Jack Ashman, as Tom at last found footing on the ledge beside the imprisoned girl.

"Oh, Mr. Brandon, how can I ever thank you!" exclaimed Jennie, seizing Tom's hand, convulsively; "but what can you do now that you are here? You can't get me down, and I can never get up over the rocks, and then—oh, save me! Save me! Here are the dogs at last!"

Suddenly the deep baying of a dog, mingled with the yelping of a dozen curs was heard above them, and down over the rocks a huge bloodhound sprang, followed by several smaller dogs.

Tom threw his arm about Jennie's waist and boldly faced the bloodhound, knowing that another spring must bring him where they stood.

CHAPTER VII.

THE BLOOD-HOUND'S LEAP TO DEATH.

"Stand firm, Miss Todd! Don't take hold of me; leave my arms free!"

It was the last Tom Brandon had time to say before the

blood-hound made his final spring down to the ledge on which they stood.

What might have been the outcome if the dog had been able to hold his footing it is difficult to say; but he was not; perhaps Tom's wild shout disconcerted him, but at all events he rested upon the ledge but an instant, and then fell snapping and snarling down over the rocks.

"Look out, boys!" yelled Tom.

The warning was not needed.

Jack Ashman and Percy Wiman broke and ran.

But the blood-hound was soon past harming them.

He struck heavily against the rocks of the lower ledge, made one wild effort to recover himself, and then rolled over the edge of the precipice to meet death a hundred feet below.

This ended it. The other dogs made no effort to follow his example, but stood barking and yelping on the level above.

"Great Scott! That settles the dog business!" cried Jack. "Say, Tom, are you all right up there?"

"Nothing the matter with us!" called Tom. "You fellows run to the place where you can get up on the dome and lend me a hand to get Miss Todd up."

"Oh, Mr. Brandon! How can I ever thank you?" breathed Jennie. "I know I should have fainted and fallen over if you had not come to me as you did."

"Don't do any fainting," laughed Tom. "It never does any good. Heavens, how those dogs bark! I wish I had something to throw at them! Don't you worry, I'm not going to leave you until Mr. Wiman and Jack get up there, and then we'll manage some way to get you up, you may depend."

Jennie seemed to gather courage from all this. "How cool you are," she said, admiringly. "I wish Mr. Wiman was like you. All this wouldn't have happened if he had not been so excitable."

"Poor fellow! Don't say a word! He's had his punishment."

"Is his arm broken, Mr. Brandon? Dear me, I thought I should die when he went over the rocks. It makes me shudder to think of it. We ought to have stood and faced the dogs. Oh, dear, I'll never come up on Overtop again."

"Hark! There's somebody coming!" cried Tom.

"Lie down there, you curs!" a deep voice could be heard calling to the dogs above them. "Get back and lie down everyone of you! Down! Down, I say!"

"It's the hermit," said Tom, for just then the strange old man appeared on the rocks above.

He was a tall and heavily built old fellow with bushy gray hair and a flowing white beard. His dress was a rough suit made of pieces of old carpet sewed together in the most primitive fashion. Two deep set black eyes peered down at Tom and Jennie from under the peak of an old otterskin cap.

For a moment he looked at them and then called out:

"Where's my blood-hound? Have you killed him? Speak?"

As the hermit carried a shot gun, Tom took particular pains to be civil in his reply.

"We never laid a finger on your dog, mister," he called out, "but he came very near being the death of this young lady."

"Huh! Lady! Joe Todd's daughter! And you—well, I can see! You must be Ben Brandon's brother. Huh! My dog is dead, I suppose. I saw him go down over the rocks. Who's to pay the bill?"

"I expect he is," replied Tom, quietly. "Are you Herman the Hermit?"

"That's what they call me. What of it—eh?"

"Nothing. I was thinking that perhaps you could help me to get this young lady up out of here. Remember, Mr. Herman, she can no more help being her father's daughter than

I can being my brother's brother. We are not responsible for your dog's death."

"Huh! Who said you were? Who said I wouldn't help you? I didn't set the dogs on Joe Todd's daughter. They are not used to strangers and they got away from me. Huh! Who said I wouldn't help you? That's what I'm here for. I'd do a good deal for Joe Todd's daughter, but if I had your brother here I'd—well—no matter! Stay where you are."

He drew back and disappeared, leaving Tom in doubt as to whether he meant to return or not.

"Don't talk much to him, Tom Brandon," said Jennie. "He's crazy, but he has always counted my father as his friend."

"Do you know him?" asked Tom.

"Only by seeing him about town. Father knows him well, though, and has often helped him. I don't think we have anything to fear."

"Let him try to harm you if he dares!" cried Tom. "I—but here he is again."

Suddenly the hermit had appeared at the edge of the cliff.

"Catch this, you Brandon boy!" he called out, throwing down a rope.

Tom caught it on the fly.

"Tie it around the girl, under her arms. Then let her climb up the best she can. I'll hold her. She can't fall."

"Are you afraid, Miss Todd?" asked Tom.

"No, indeed. I can do it so. But you, Tom—I mean Mr. Brandon."

"No, you don't. You mean Tom, for that's what everybody calls me. Don't you worry about me. I can go either up or down without any rope."

"Are you going to do it, or ain't you going to do it?" called the hermit; "because, if you ain't, I'm going away."

Tom passed the rope under Jennie's arms and knotted it securely. Jennie showed little fear when she began the perilous ascent, but Tom watched her breathlessly. Twice his heart was in his throat, so to speak, for she missed her footing, but the rope supported her perfectly, and in a moment Jennie stood safe with the hermit on the rocks, the dogs fawning around her feet.

"Do you want help, you Brandon boy, or can you get up alone?" called the hermit.

"Oh, send him the rope, Mr. Herman!" cried Jennie. "Tom, you must not try it without!"

Perhaps Tom was glad of the excuse, for he certainly would have tried it otherwise.

The rope came down again and he tied it around his body and started the climb.

It was easier than he had expected and he did not miss his footing once.

In a few moments he was with Jennie and the hermit on the rocks.

"I'm sure we are very much obliged to you," he said. "I'm sorry you have lost your dog, but it was his life or ours—you must understand that."

"I do understand it," replied old Herman, looking hard at him from under his shaggy brows. "The dog would have torn you to pieces if he had caught you on the ledge. Never mind. Joe Todd will pay me for him."

"I'm sure he will," said Jennie. "I shall tell him that it was not your fault."

"Tell him nothing. Leave it to me, girl. Ben Brandon's brother, I want to speak to you alone. Girl, you walk away."

Tom would have protested, but Jennie motioned him to comply, and walked on over the rocks looking off at the vast expanse of country which lay spread out at their feet, mountains rising above mountains for miles and miles.

"What did you want to say to me?" asked Tom. "I can't leave Miss Todd alone."

"What brought you here?" asked the hermit, in his deep mysterious voice. "Was it fate? Boy, I wanted to see you. Listen to what I have to say."

"I'm listening."

"You are Ben's brother?"

"Yes, yes! You know that."

"Yes; I know it, and I know Ben. Mark what I say! If you want to save your brother from trouble—serious trouble—be at the Woodville bank at half past two next Wednesday morning. Come armed, and don't go alone, but say nothing of your reason for going as you value your life, and don't speak to your brother about it either—mind that!"

"What in the world do you mean?" demanded Tom. "Wait a minute. I must know more."

But the hermit did not seem disposed to wait.

He had turned and walked away as soon as the last word was spoken.

"Don't try to follow me!" he called back. "If you do there'll be trouble. I have warned you—heed the warning or not, just as you please."

Thus saying the hermit whistled up his dogs, plunged into the bushes and disappeared.

CHAPTER VIII.

GOOD BUSINESS AT THE SHOP.

"What did he say to you, Tom?" asked Jennie. "What makes you look so pale?"

Before Tom could answer Jack Ashman and Percy Wiman came hurrying up, they having ascended to the dome by the usual path.

Tom was only too glad of the interruption, for he was greatly troubled.

To his immense relief Jennie did not allude to the subject again, but turned to inquire about Percy Wiman's arm, which proved to be broken just below the elbow.

As it was already beginning to swell and promised to be a serious matter, Tom proposed that they immediately start down the mountain and make the best of their way home.

They reached Woodville just before dusk, young Wiman having a hard time of it. Still he managed to ride his wheel, and they left him at the doctor's house.

Tom parted with Jennie at the post-office.

He was going to offer to see her home, but just as he had it on his tongue's end to propose it, Ben came riding up on his new wheel which threw Tom's shabby old affair all in the shade.

He glared at Tom, but did not speak. Raising his hat to Jennie, he asked permission to escort her to Highlands. Tom did not wait to hear her answer, but just said good-night and rode away alone, for Jack Ashman had gone into the doctor's with Percy Wiman.

If he had been the possessor of a better wheel Tom might have stood his ground, but as it was, he went right back to the shop.

"No matter," he thought. "I saved her from a lot of trouble to say the least. I don't think she's the girl to forget."

Dismissing the boy, Tom ate his supper and prepared for the evening trade.

But his heart was not in it. The hermit's strange words were uppermost in his mind. "Shall I try to see Ben and tell him?" he thought, "or shall I just do as I was told? What does it mean, anyhow? I wish I knew."

Even the good business of the evening was not sufficient to drive these thoughts away.

And business was good.

Tom sold two old wheels that night, besides taking in several repair jobs.

Evening was his best time, for then the mill hands were free, and until nine o'clock Tom's store was full of young fellows talking wheel, which made the cigar and pop trade good, too.

"If this thing keeps up I shall have all the business I want," thought Tom, as he closed his little store that night.

For the rest of the week things drifted along quietly enough.

After giving the matter careful thought, Tom determined to follow out the hermit's warning to the letter, so he said nothing, but, in spite of the intense uneasiness of mind he felt, kept on the even tenor of his way.

Saturday came and no letter from Mr. Sammis or the Buffalo wheel people, but on Monday morning the postman brought the expected missive.

It was in a long envelope, and Tom opened it with trembling hand.

"Is it yes or no?" he thought. "If I get that agency my future is assured."

It was yes—very much yes! Tom's cheeks flushed with pleasure as he read the typewritten missive, which was to the effect that having been highly recommended by their Mr. Sammis, the wheel concern had decided to appoint him sole agent for the Buffalo bicycle for Woodville and the adjoining towns. And the letter went on to say:

"You can, on receipt of this, order proper signs painted and forward the bill to us. We have shipped you this day twenty wheels of assorted styles and five tandems, which we trust you will be careful to keep in good condition until sold. This is entirely contrary to our usual practice, for we do not entrust our goods to strangers without security, but you have been so highly recommended to Mr. Sammis by your fellow townsmen that we feel assured our interests will be duly guarded. A package of literature, circulars, catalogues, etc., relating to our wheels also goes forward to-day. Distribute these to the best advantage and charge the expense to our account. Your commission on all sales will be twenty per cent., and we rely upon you to uphold our prices and give no part of this commission to the purchaser, although you are free to make such trades for old wheels as you may desire; these, however, we can under no circumstances take off your hands."

There was more to the letter, but as it related to matters of little interest we shall not give it, but Tom read it, every line, and then read it again. He could scarcely believe in his good fortune. The future looked very bright.

Next day the wheels came, and his work was done by Tuesday noon, and three o'clock the signs were all in place.

As Tom went out to have a look at them, Ben rode by in his carriage.

Tom saw him glance at the signs and then turn his head away contemptuously, but this disagreeable incident was outweighed by what followed later.

It began at seven o'clock when Col. Todd came dashing up in his span.

There were several young fellows in the shop looking at the new wheels at the time, and Tom did not allow himself to even glance at his important visitor until he entered the shop.

"Ah! Tom Brandon! What's this?" demanded the big man of Woodville, as he bustled into the shop. "I hear you've got the agency for the Buffalo wheel."

"Yes, sir," replied Tom, quietly. "Here they are. It's a wheel I can recommend."

"Just what I want to ask you. Have you time to explain the points?"

"Just a moment, sir," replied Tom. "Sorry to keep you waiting, but this gentleman is ahead of you."

It was a young man from the back part of the town, whose name Tom did not know, but he was apparently on the eve of purchasing, and he resolved not to leave him to wait on Col. Todd or any one else; and the young man's next words showed that he was quite right.

"I think I'll take this wheel," he said. "Is seventy-five dollars the best you can do?"

"For that one, yes, but here's one for fifty."

"No; this suits me better. I don't want to take it now, but I may as well pay you. I'd like a bill, please."

Tom had no billheads as yet, but he made out a bill on a piece of paper and the purchaser paid over his cash and went out.

"Now, then, Colonel Todd, what can I do for you?" asked Tom. "Sorry you had to wait."

"Don't say that. I don't like toadies, young man. 'I'm willing to wait my turn.'"

"I hope I never may find it necessary to toady to anyone," replied Tom, flushing. "It ain't my style, but I don't like to keep a business man waiting just the same."

"That's all right. I'm through business for the day. While I have a chance let me thank you for what you did for my girl on Overtop last week. I've been out of town ever since, or I'd have been round before."

"There's nothing to thank me for, sir. I only did what any gentleman would do."

"Not at all. Precious few would have dared to do it. I know the place well. Confound that old humbug of a hermit! He ought to be prosecuted for keeping those dogs. Now, then, let's see the wheels."

It was wheel talk for the next twenty minutes.

Tom showed the good points and told the weak ones as compared with other wheels.

"I don't claim that this wheel is perfection," he wound up by saying, "but I do claim that it is the best wheel on the market for the money. That's all I've got to say."

"Well, I think they'll suit. My girl wants a new wheel and a tandem. You may send both up to the house to-morrow. I'll make you out a check."

Tom flushed with pleasure. Business was getting lively at the little shop.

"Will you pick one out or leave it to me, colonel?" he asked.

"I'll leave it to you," replied the colonel. "By the way, do you happen to know where Ben is?"

"I'm sure I don't," replied Tom, getting nervous all at once. "Isn't he around town? I saw him this afternoon."

"You did, eh? I haven't been there in three days."

"My brother and I are not on very good terms. I know nothing about his movements."

"So I've understood; but I thought perhaps you might. Should he happen in here tell him I must see him at once. Good evening, Tom. Don't forget to send up the wheels."

Whereupon Colonel Todd departed, leaving Tom a little more anxious than he had been before.

But he was given no time to think about it, for business kept right on.

The Colonel had hardly gone when in came Charley Kidd and Percy Wiman with his arm in a sling.

"I've fixed it, Tom!" cried the latter, who had taken a great fancy to our hero since the affair on Overtop. "The Wheel Club have consented to try the Buffalo. Send us up four wheels to-morrow and we'll use them in the afternoon race. If they suit I've got customers for them all, and if they are damaged, why I'll foot the bill. All our boys will be in for the Buffalo if these do what you claim."

"I'll chance 'em," said Tom. "They'll not come back again I'll guarantee."

"I don't believe they will," replied Percy. "By the way, what did the colonel want?"

"He bought a wheel and a tandem and paid cash down—that's all."

"Phew! Business seems to be booming in this shop," laughed Percy, and then they began discussing the merits of the Buffalo wheel and kept it up until Tom was ready to close for the night.

CHAPTER IX.

BURGLARS IN THE BANK.

"Tom, what in the world does it all mean?"

Jack Ashman said it. His big round eyes were wide open and fixed upon Tom with a puzzled look.

"Don't ask me, Jack," replied Tom. "You know all I know. Put yourself in my place and tell me what you would do."

It was late Wednesday evening. The little bicycle shop had just closed after another successful day's business. Buffalo wheels were booming right along.

The afternoon race on the fair ground which Tom attended, of course, had to all appearance decided the fate of the Buffalo wheel in Woodville.

The first and second in were both Buffalos. One of the other wheels was ridden by a young man who was scarcely more than a beginner, and the fourth was not used as the fellow for whom it was intended did not turn up.

Result—two wheels sold on the fair grounds and three more in the store during the evening.

Tom began to be seriously concerned about his stock, and he determined to write for more wheels at once, remitting the cash for those already sold.

But this was Wednesday, and there was something else to think about. That was the reason why Tom sent for Jack Ashman to stay with him that night, but Jack had not the least suspicion what it meant until the store was closed and Tom's story told, and even then he did not understand it very well, as his remarks showed.

"What do you propose to do?" he asked. "Are you really going down there at half past two in the morning, and alone if I don't go?"

"That's what I am," replied Tom, firmly, "and I don't want you to go, Jack, unless you are willing. I've broken the hermit's orders by telling you what I have, but, of course, I couldn't ask you to go without letting you know at least as much as I know myself."

"I should hope not," replied Jack. "You and I have been altogether too thick to make anything of that kind allowable, Tom, but I'll be blest if I can understand it at all."

"No more can I."

"But you have your suspicions."

"Perhaps I don't want to name them though."

"They say Ben is going it at a pretty steep rate, Tom."

"Perhaps I know less about my brother even than you do. Will you go or not, Jack? Mind you, I shan't think a bit the less of you if you say no."

"But I won't say no. I say yes," cried Jack. "I'll bet I ain't the sort of fellow to go back on my friends."

The boys tried to sleep after that, but it was no use so far as Tom was concerned.

At quarter past two he woke up Jack, who had just lain down on the old sofa without taking off his clothes, and fastening the store door securely behind them, they walked down Main street in the direction of the bank.

It was deathly still, and the clouded sky made it very dark. Strangely enough the electric light on the bank corner was

out, and owing to the trees it was darker than ever here, when the boys paused and looked up at the bank.

"Everything seems to be quiet enough in there," breathed Jack. "Say, Tom, what time is it?"

"It ought to be just about half past two," replied Tom, "but it's so dark I can't see my watch."

"Let's go to the rear."

They turned the corner of Church street, out of which an alley led in behind the bank.

They had just reached the corner of the alley, when a woman with her face enveloped in a heavy shawl glided out of the darkness.

She paused suddenly at seeing them and drew back.

"Stop!" whispered Tom. "What are you doing here! For Heaven's sake! Jennie Todd!"

Suddenly the girl withdrew the shawl and revealed her face.

"Oh, Tom Brandon!" she wailed. "Help me! Help me! There are burglars in the bank!"

CHAPTER X.

TOM TURNS RECEIVER OF STOLEN GOODS.

"Jennie!" breathed Tom. "What in the world brings you here?"

"Oh, Tom, I'm so wretched," whispered Colonel Todd's daughter, seizing his arm. "Help me if you can!"

Both seemed to have forgotten ceremony in the excitement of the moment.

Tom Brandon saw at a glance that there was something seriously wrong; the thought came to him that Jennie had been sent there by Herman, the Hermit, the same as himself, but this did not explain the mystery; rather increased it if anything. Tom was terribly perplexed.

"What is it, Jennie? What if there are burglars in the bank? Why do you come here?"

"Don't ask me, Tom. Don't say a word but if you have any regard for me do as I tell you—I'll never forget it of you, Tom, never, if you help me this night."

"Jennie, I'd give my life to help you out of a hole."

"Swear that you will never tell that you've seen me here."

"I never will! May I die if I do!"

"Jack Ashman, go away and leave us," said Jennie, suddenly turning to Jack. "Go! Go now! Tell him to go, Tom."

"But I can't," said Jack. "I'm here to stand by Tom, 'I ain't going to be driven off.'"

"Go, Jack," said Tom. "This is Miss Todd's private business. I see it now. Go, if you have any regard for me."

"I'll go if you say so, Tom, but I'd rather stay and see it out."

"Jack Ashman, shall I go down on my knees to you?" whispered Jennie, fiercely. "I'll do it if you say so, only go and never breathe a word of what you have seen and heard this night."

"Go, Jack," said Tom. "Please go."

"Shan't I send help?"

"No, no," whispered Jennie. "Oh, go, before it's too late!"

Jack hurried away, deeply puzzled.

"I wouldn't do it for anybody, but Tom Brandon," he muttered. "I'm going to get myself into trouble by this—sure."

As soon as Jack had turned the corner Jennie caught Tom's arm and led him around through the alley behind the bank.

Here she paused and held up her finger, and they listened.

Strange sounds could be heard inside the bank, and yet all was dark there.

"They're in there," breathed Tom.

"Yes; they are there," said Jennie. "Tom, I know your brother has not used you well."

"He has not, Jennie."

"Still he is your brother, and although he is cold and proud, he is an honest man at heart, and I know it. You want to save him, Tom."

"Save him from what?"

"Listen! In a few moments the burglars will come out of the bank. Stand here in the shadow and they will take you for Ben."

"Everybody does that, Jennie. What do you mean?"

"Let them do it. Whatever is stolen in there will be given to you. Say as little as possible, but the instant they leave you cut through the alley with what they give you, and back to your shop. Hide what you get—somewhere—anywhere, so that it will be safe, and never tell what you have done to a living soul but Ben, until I give you permission."

"Jennie!"

"Oh, I know what you are thinking of. Tom, trust me! Yes, it's the bank's money. Don't give it to Ben, but refer him to me if he asks for it. Tell him your promise. You have promised, Tom."

"Oh, Jennie, how can I do this? It may ruin me for life!"

"It may save me from ruin but it will never ruin you, for should you be arrested, I shall come forward at once and tell the truth."

Tom was all in a tremble.

"I can't do it, Jennie—I can't," he groaned.

Just then the sound of a muffled explosion was heard inside the bank.

"They've blown the safe!" gasped Jennie. "Quick, Tom! Decide! For my sake—there ain't a moment to be lost!"

"For your sake I'll do it, Jennie," said Tom, in hollow tones.

"And for your brother's sake."

She seized Tom's hand and kissed it, then turning, ran rapidly down the alley and disappeared.

To describe Tom Brandon's feelings is something not to be attempted.

There he was in the dark alley long after midnight, alone and unarmed, waiting to meet a gang of desperate burglars.

It was horrible. Perhaps not another boy in Woodville would have stood his ground.

But Ben!

To his mind there was but one explanation. Jennie loved Ben and Ben was to be there to receive the stolen money. She knew it and would save him—that was what Tom thought and the thought was a bitter one, for Tom loved Jennie. He knew it now.

Just about that time Tom heartily wished that he was not Ben's brother.

But he stood his ground and waited for the burglars to come out of the bank.

Every minute seemed an age. The clock in the Methodist steeple struck two. All sound had ceased inside the bank now. It was as still as death.

Suddenly Tom saw the bank door cautiously opened, and his heart stood still.

They were coming out. First it was the man in the black cloak—the desperado who had attacked him on School street. Next it was the two men he had met by Colonel Todd's wall.

Last came a tall man, wearing an ulster with a slouch hat pulled down over his eyes.

He carried a small grip which seemed to be heavy

All four glanced around warily, and seeing Tom, hurried up to him.

"That you, Ben?" asked the man with the bag, in a hoarse voice.

"Yes," replied Tom, trembling from head to foot.

"Here, take it. I'm going with the boys. Remember—tomorrow, at ten o'clock.

"All right," said Tom, taking the bag.

"Was there much noise when she blew up?" asked the man in the black cloak.

"Very little," said Tom.

"Don't let's stop to talk," interrupted the man in the ulster. "Cut, Ben! Heaven knows who may come; we're all ruined if we are seen. You ought to have disguised yourself. It wasn't safe to come so."

No answer seemed to be expected, and Tom made none.

Clutching the handle of the grip, he ran up the alley as fast as his legs could carry him.

When he got behind Stratton's store, he looked back and saw that all four men had disappeared and after that he stopped for nothing until he had reached the door of his little shop.

With trembling hand he turned the key and let himself in, shutting the door and bolting it.

"Oh, what have I done!" he groaned, dropping the grip on the floor. "If Jack Ashman speaks out I am ruined."

He threw the grip from him and sank down upon the old sofa, burying his face in his hands.

Had Tom Brandon recognized the man in the ulster?

Perhaps.

At all events he seemed to have lost faith in Jennie Todd.

CHAPTER XI.

BROTHERS.

For some moments Tom Brandon sat there on the old sofa and never moved.

"It's no use! I may as well be hung for an old sheep as a lamb," he muttered, at last. "I'm going the whole figure. If Jennie goes back on me I am lost. As for Jack, he'll be sure to tell somebody. He never could hold his tongue."

Just then came the temptation to break his promise to Jennie, and deliver up the contents of the grip to the bank people.

But to whom should he give it?

Ben was president, Colonel Todd managing director and the actual head of the bank.

Mr. Merwin, the cashier, was a crusty, sour old fellow, who was known by everybody in Woodville to be a mere tool of Colonel Todd.

For reasons which he scarcely dared to think of, Tom could not trust Mr. Merwin in this emergency.

He could not give back the money. As he reasoned it out, there was no one to give it to but Ben, and Tom would have cut off his right hand sooner than do that.

"No, I can't do it. I've got to stick to my agreement," thought the boy. "Wait! I will fight my own battle. I'll show them all that I am up-to-date. Let them arrest me, if they dare."

Then it occurred to Tom that it would be a good plan to see what was actually in the grip.

He got out his bed quilt and blankets and hung them in front of the window, carefully pinning the edges in place, working all the while in the dark.

This done, he ventured to light the lamp which he placed on the floor, shielding it by his coat hung over a chair. Tom felt like a thief as he did all this, but he felt also that he could take no chance of the light being seen from the street.

All being arranged, Tom opened the grip. It was not fastened, but only held together by the spring lock and the catches at the sides.

There was money in the grip—lots of it.

Great packages of greenbacks came out, and several small bags; one had gold in it, another silver coins, another cents.

"They took the whole business, that's sure," thought Tom. "I wonder how much is here?"

At first he thought he would count it, but after running

over one of the packages he saw that it would take entirely too long.

There was many thousand dollars in his possession, that was certain.

"I must hide it," thought Tom, "and I must do it right away. Heavens! There's another man who knows all, and that's Herman, the Hermit. Of course, he knows, he must. I'm running a terrible risk."

But he did not hesitate—he could not. Tumbling the plunder back into the grip, Tom pulled the old sofa out from the wall.

Then he got out his hammer and cold chisel, and with as little noise as possible, raised two of the floor boards.

The little shop stood on a stone foundation, and was raised about eighteen inches off the ground.

Tom dropped the grip down into this vacant space and carefully restored the boards to their original position, and pushed the sofa back.

"I'll go to bed now," he thought, and he was about to remove the quilt and blankets from the windows, when he was terribly startled by hearing a cautious knock on the door.

He stood perfectly still, and did not answer. He could not. His heart was in his throat.

Again the knocking came, this time a little louder.

"Who's there?" called Tom, going up to the door.

"Tom! Tom! Let me in! It's I—Ben!" came the voice through the keyhole.

It was coming now!

Tom's hand was as cold as ice as he shot the bolt and turned the key.

"Oh, Ben!" he grasped, when his brother slid into the shop, immediately closing the door behind him.

Ben was as white as a sheet. He glanced about at the quilt and blankets, and then looked at Tom.

"Great Heaven! what have you done, Tom Brandon?" he asked. "Do you want to ruin me? You've got something here—you know what it is! Give it to me, Tom! Give it to me, or I'll shoot you where you stand!"

Evidently Ben was desperate.

He drew a revolver and leveled it at Tom.

Here was the opportunity for the brightest boy in Woodville to show what sort of stuff he was made of.

Tom was quite equal to the occasion.

He stood up before his brother and never flinched.

"Ben, if you want to kill me, you can!" he said, calmly. "I'll never raise my hand against you. You are my brother. I don't forget."

Ben dropped the revolver on the floor, and sank down upon the old sofa with a deep groan.

"Oh Tom, Tom, you have ruined me!" he said, burying his face in his hands.

He sobbed aloud; he was so overcome that he could not speak.

Cold and proud as he was, Ben still had feelings and Tom had touched them. He sobbed all the harder when Tom sat down beside him and put his arm around his neck.

"Don't, Ben! Don't," he said. "I would not harm you. Don't talk of ruin! I believe in my soul I have saved you—saved you from yourself. Do you remember what I said when you threatened me in this very room? I told you then that if ever you were in trouble, Ben, I wouldn't go back on you as you had on me."

Ben sprang from the sofa, and began pacing the floor.

"Then, now is the time for you to make your promise good," he cried. "Tom, you have got something here that I must have. You know what. Who put you up to this?"

Tom was silent. Somehow, he could not bring himself to mention Jennie's name.

"Never mind. I pass on that. I know I've been cold and hard to you, Tom. I admit it; but stand by me now. Give me the bank money and I'll do the right thing by you. You shall be made my assistant at the mill, or you shall go on the road for the corporation at a big salary, or anything else you may ask."

"No, Ben. I shall stay right here and sell bicycles. I don't want your favors, and what's more, I won't have them. If I give you that money it will be your ruin. Is it not so?"

"No, no! It will ruin me if you don't."

"I won't."

"You have it?"

"Yes."

"Where?"

"I won't tell. When I am told to deliver it up by the person who told me to take it, I'll do it and not before."

"Then I'm a lost man, and all Woodville will go down in the crash. Tom, Tom, you don't know what you have done! Oh! if I had only been there on time, Jennie Todd never would have had the chance to play me this trick."

Tom caught his breath, but did not speak.

"Of course, he knows," he thought; "but I won't discuss Jennie with him."

For some moments Ben continued to pace the floor without speaking.

The silence was becoming painful. Tom would have given worlds to see him go.

"Trust me, Ben," he said, at last. "I'm saving you from yourself. I feel it—I know it. The money is safe. Explain all to me, and perhaps we may be able to come to some understanding, but for your sake as well as my own, I will not make a move in the dark."

"Is the money here in this shop?" demanded Ben, suddenly.

"No," replied Tom, speaking truly, for the money was not in the shop but under it.

"It's lucky for you that it ain't. I don't think you would be such a fool as to bring it here. Wait, Tom Brandon! Tomorrow you will find yourself in jail. I can strike as well as you."

"Do it, if you dare!" cried Tom.

Ben then seized Tom by the throat. "Give me that money! Give it to me, I say!"

His grip was terrible.

"I'll kill you if you don't give it up. Brother or no brother, I—"

Rat! tat! tat!

Rat! tat! tat!

Suddenly there was a loud knocking at the door.

CHAPTER XII.

AN ASTOUNDING PROPOSITION.

"Wake up, inside there! Wake up! Hello! Hello, Brandon!" shouted several voices outside.

Ben instantly released his hold.

"Is there any way out of here besides the front door?" he whined. "Of course I don't want to be seen."

Tom silently pointed to the back door. He was trembling so that he could not speak.

Ben unlocked the door hastily.

"Good-by, Tom," he said, in a hoarse voice. "You have ruined me. You will never see me again alive."

He flung open the door and hurried out into the night.

"Ben! Ben! Come back, Ben!" called Tom, half repenting.

There was no answer, but the knocking came louder than ever.

"Let him go!" something seemed to say to the boy. "Let him go!"

Tom pulled himself together and staggered around to the front.

Three men with bicycles stood there, all strangers.

"Hello!" called one. "Sorry to disturb you, boss, are you the proprietor here?"

"Yes," gasped Tom.

"You repair wheels?"

"Yes."

"I've broken down and as it is absolutely necessary for me to get on, I had to bother you. We belong to the Harlem Cyclers. We are making a run on a big bet. Help me out and I'll pay you any price you may ask."

"Wait a minute and I'll open the door," replied Tom, getting his wits together.

He was thankful for the interruption. Hurrying back into the shop he hastily removed the quilt and blankets and threw them on the sofa, making it look as though he had been asleep there, and then opened the door.

"It's ever so good of you," said the wheelmen, as they brought in their bikes. "I saw your sign, but I hesitated a long time about disturbing you. Mightn't have done it, but I thought I heard voices inside here."

"Perhaps I was talking in my sleep," muttered Tom. "Let me look at the wheel; your chain is broken in two places. How did it happen?"

"Blest if I know," replied the wheelman. "It came all of a sudden; all I can tell you is I found myself in the road."

"I can't very well repair this now," said Tom. "It will have to go to the blacksmith. I don't do that work myself, but I can put on a new chain."

Tom brought out his chains and soon found one to fit.

"That's the talk!" said the wheelman. "I'm a million times obliged, and the Harlems' will never forget you. What's the pay?"

"Only the price of the chain," said Tom.

"Nonsense! Here's ten dollars."

"Oh, I can't take it."

"Why not? A doctor would charge as much called up in the night."

"Our doctors don't."

"But it's worth that to me, and I won't take the change," declared the wheelman.

Then, bidding Tom good-by, they all sprang upon their wheels and went spinning away.

Tom looked at the clock. It was after four.

"I'll go right to work," he thought. "It will keep me from thinking, anyhow."

And the early risers in Woodville that morning told each other that Ben's brother was bound to succeed.

"Why," said one, "I saw him at five o'clock tinkering away at his old bikes."

Tom worked straight on, not even stopping for breakfast. His heart was too full. He could not eat.

At a little after eight Mr. Parfitt went hurrying past.

"Tom! Tom!" he cried out through the open door. "Did you hear the news! Burglars in the bank last night! Every cent taken—over a hundred thousand dollars! I'm in for three thousand myself!"

Away went Parfitt with his hat on the back of his head looking wild.

Soon the news spread all over town, and a crowd flocked to the bank.

But Tom Brandon kept right on tinkering bikes and never said a word.

"If Jack would only come it would relieve my mind immensely!" he thought.

But Jack did not come, though others did.

Trade was good.

Four wheels came in to be repaired, and a man in a farmer's wagon stopped and bought a bike, not haggling over ten minutes about the price.

At nine o'clock a boy came into the shop and handed Tom a letter.

"Who's this from?" Tom demanded.

"Read it and find out," said the boy, and then he ran away.

Tom tore open the envelope. He felt instinctively that it was from Jennie Todd, and he was right.

The letter read as follows:

"TOM:—Father will see you this morning. Whatever he asks you to do, for my sake do it, and don't say a word.

JENNIE."

"I must go by orders," thought Tom, and he tore the letter up into little pieces. "It's too late to back out now."

But his anxiety was terrible.

He felt like running out the back door, when he saw Colonel Todd's stylish team coming down the street.

The colonel himself was driving, and Thomas, the groom, sat beside him with folded arms.

Handing over the reins, the colonel jumped out and entered the shop.

"Good morning, Tom Brandon!" he exclaimed, cheerfully. "How's the wheel business? Booming? That was a fine wheel you sold my girl. She's delighted with it. By the way, where's Ben?"

"I don't know, sir," replied Tom, quietly, ignoring the meaningless small talk.

"Have you seen him since yesterday?"

"I have."

"Ha! Where is he now?"

Colonel Todd's voice trembled in spite of his effort to appear calm.

"I can't tell you anything about my brother, sir," replied Tom.

The colonel looked at Tom fixedly for a moment.

"Tom Brandon, you are a bright boy," he said, slowly. "I don't know that I would make a mistake if I said you were the brightest boy in town."

Tom merely nodded. He was on pins to know what was coming next.

"I'm sure if you knew where Ben was you would tell me," continued the colonel, "and—and—well, here goes, Tom. I'm in a hole. If Ben ain't seen at the mill this morning by ten o'clock I shall never get out of it. In short, I shall be ruined. Tom, I'm going to ask you a big favor and I shall never forget you if you say yes, but on the other hand—mark me—I'll ruin you, boy, if you say no!"

"What do you want me to do, Colonel Todd?" he asked, in his usual quiet way.

"I want you to put on a suit of Ben's clothes and come down to the mill. I want you to sit at Ben's desk and be Ben and do what I tell you to do, and say what I tell you to say. Is it yes or no?"

Tom hesitated for a moment.

"Decide," breathed the big man of Woodville. "I shan't ask you twice, Tom Brandon."

"I have decided," replied Tom. "Yes; I'll go."

CHAPTER XIII.

TOM PLAYS LEFT BOWER.

Little did Tom Brandon realize the risk he ran in consenting to Colonel Todd's strange request.

It is safe to say that no one should ever attempt to personate another; but Tom was young and had still much to

learn of the world and its ways, bright as he was about most things.

What he was about to do he did for Jennie's sake and for Ben's, for he felt that his brother's honor was in Jennie's hands.

The moment he had gained Tom's consent, Colonel Todd fell back to his usual light and airy manner.

"That's all right!" he said. "Tom Brandon, I thank you in advance. Let's see, you'll have to dress like Ben to begin with. How shall we manage that?"

"You'll have to do the managing, colonel. I have only the clothes you see me in. They are not much like Ben's."

"No; I should say not. These won't do. Let me see, let me see! We'll have to get a suit of Ben's clothes and a watch and chain, and—well, I have it. Meet me at the club room in fifteen minutes. You know where it is! Up-stairs in the Miller block. You can knock twice on the door."

"Very well, sir," replied Tom. "I'll be there."

He did not like this proposition at all, but he had given his word, and he was determined to fulfill it.

"I may as well go the whole hog," he muttered, after the colonel had departed, "but I don't like this business for a cent."

By this time Colonel Todd had taken his departure.

Calling Jerry Brown, the boy who usually "tended store" for him in his absence, Tom hurried to the Miller Block and knocked twice on the club room door, which was opened by the colonel, who seemed to be the only occupant of the handsomely furnished rooms.

It was the first time Tom had ever entered the mysterious precincts of Woodville's famous club, and he glanced around curiously, "taking in" the handsome buffet, with its arrays of decanters and glasses, the billiard and pool tables, the card tables and the pictures on the wall.

"All this is what has been the ruination of poor Ben," he thought, but Colonel Todd cut his reflections short.

"Here you are, Ben—I mean Tom,"—he said, leading the way into a room where there were a great many private lockers.

"Don't you mistake me for Ben, sir," said Tom. "That won't do at all."

"Certainly not. I beg your pardon, but you two do look so much alike. Not much danger of really mistaking you for your brother, though. If I don't know Ben Brandon, there is nobody in Woodville who does. Ben has been my right bower ever since he was a boy."

"And now you are making me your left bower," said Tom, coolly. "Well, in some games the left bower is the winning card."

"What do you mean by that?" demanded Colonel Todd, turning on the boy fiercely.

"Oh, nothing."

"Don't get too smart, Tom Brandon."

"No danger, sir. I'm just smart enough, that's all."

"There's trouble ahead if you don't stick to me, and there's big money and position ahead if you do."

"I don't want either, sir. I can earn my money, and I'm just as proud of my position as Woodville's best bicycle tinker as you are as owner of the mill."

"That will do. You're a bright boy, Tom, and there's a big future before you. The left bower's a good card. I'll look out that it's played at the right time."

"Good, unless the other fellow has the right or the joker. But I didn't come here to talk. What do you want me to do?"

Colonel Todd opened one of the lockers and took out a handsome suit of clothes.

"There are Ben's," he said. "Put them on."

Without a word Tom took off his own well worn garments and put on the other suit.

Colonel Todd had a pair of shoes to match, and a fine new hat and a collar and a stylish tie. And when Tom had completed his toilet, he handed him a splendid gold watch and chain.

Tom accepted all this with perfect coolness, and when he was fully attired, obeyed the colonel's orders to look in the glass.

He was amazed.

It was just as though Ben stood there looking at him.

"You'll do," chuckled the colonel. "I defy any one to say that you are not Ben."

"I'm ready for business, sir," said Tom. "If you have any instructions to give, now is the time."

"You'll get your instructions at the office," said the colonel. "Let's see, it is now seven minutes to ten. You want to be there about half past ten. Walk right into Ben's private office, just as though you belonged there. You will open his desk—here's the key—and begin by opening the mail, which is Ben's usual morning work. If any one speaks to you, you will personate Ben. A little later I will come and all this will be explained."

"Very well, sir. And in the meantime?"

"In the meantime you will stay here. I don't think anybody will be in, but if any one does come, of course you are Ben."

Whereupon Colonel Todd hastily left the club room, leaving Tom to reflect upon the singular position in which he found himself placed.

Scarcely had the colonel departed when Tom was startled by the sudden opening of a closet door behind him.

To his utter amazement there stood Ben.

"The scoundrel!" he gasped, shaking his clenched fist at the door through which the colonel had just passed. "Oh, the scoundrel! I see his plan now! Tom, save me! Oh, Tom!"

And Ben dropped on his knees at his brother's feet, and catching him around the legs, burst out in a passion of wild sobs.

"Save me, Tom! Save me, Tom! Save me from that man," he kept saying.

"Ben! Oh, don't! Heavens! I'll do anything for you—anything. The money——"

"Don't tell me where it is. Tom; don't say a word, but if you have got the little red book which you found on the night of the fire, I implore you to give it to me. See, Tom! I beg it on my knees! And for every slight and insult I have heaped upon you since you came to Woodville, I humbly beg your pardon, only give me that book."

"Get up, Ben! You musn't!" groaned Tom. "I'd give you the book willingly if I had it, but I haven't. Tell me what all this means, Ben, and I'll be better able to help you. What am I to do?"

"Do what he told you to do, Tom. It will give me time to turn," replied Ben, hoarsely, as he staggered to his feet.

"You can't depend upon me; but, Ben, you won't desert me if I get into trouble?"

"Never, Tom. Never."

"But can't you give me some hint, some——"

"Hush! Somebody coming!" breathed Ben.

He jumped back into the closet, and Tom heard him fasten the door.

A latch key was grating in the outer door, and in walked Joe Sanford, one of Woodville's sports, a young gentleman of leisure, who affected fast horses, gambling, etc., and was never known to work.

"Hello, Brandon," he said, carelessly. "What are you doing here at this early hour? Great Scott? You look sober enough

to have just lost your grandmother. I came in for a drink. Won't you join me? If I don't have my Manhattan in the morning I'm upset for the entire day."

"Thank you, I don't think I will," replied Tom, dropping into a chair beside the long table and taking up the morning paper.

"What, what? Off your tod? This is unusual. Nothing wrong old man?"

"No; only I don't care for a drink just now."

"Worried about that bank robbery, I s'pose," said Joe, opening his locker and taking out a private bottle.

Then he kept rattling on about the bank affair, as he proceeded to mix the cocktail.

Tom said as little as possible, and after Joe Sanford had "got outside" of the cocktail he departed, much to the relief of Ben's brother, whose thoughts then turned to Ben.

Tom sprang up and hurried to the closet.

"Ben! Ben!" he called. "He's gone, Ben."

He fully expected that Ben would come out, but he didn't. In fact, there was no answer.

Tom tried the door and found it unfastened.

Ben had vanished. The closet was empty. Tom now saw that it had two doors, and upon opening the second discovered that it communicated with a back stair-case, and Ben's disappearance was explained.

Time was up now.

Tom saw by the handsome clock on the mantel-piece in the card-room, that he would have to hurry to reach the mill office by half-past ten.

So he hastily left the club room and struck across the Common toward the mill.

"Look out for yourself, Colonel Todd," he muttered; "you thought you'd flatter me when you called me the brightest boy in town, but—well, it's something to be even the left bower in a game like this."

CHAPTER XIV.

"ARREST BEN BRANDON! I CHARGE HIM WITH ROBBING THE WOODVILLE BANK!"

When Tom walked into the mill office, it was precisely half-past ten by the big clock which hung against the wall.

Nobody paid the least attention to him.

Tom came to the conclusion that Ben could not be in the habit of saying good-morning to the clerks in the office, for nobody said good-morning to him.

He opened the gate in the handsome brass railing, and passed into his brother's private room.

There was a plainly dressed man sitting in the outer office reading the New York morning paper.

He did not even look up when Tom entered. Tom thought that he must be a stranger in Woodville. At least he never remembered seeing him before.

With trembling hand he unlocked the desk and pushed the top back. Then, taking up the mail, which lay upon the little slide, he began to open the letters. As he was thus engaged the telephone rang.

"Am I expected to attend to this?" he thought, for nobody paid any attention to the bell.

Evidently he was. Tom went to the 'phone and called, "Hello!"

"This is Bradley & Hines," came over the wire. "How many bales of that cotton will you take?"

"Can't decide now!" called Tom, promptly. "I'll call you up later. I shall have to see Colonel Todd about that."

A few moments later Mr. Blackwell, the boss of the picking room, came in.

"Can I speak to you, Mr. Brandon?" he asked, looking over the rail.

"Certainly. Come right in," said Tom, as coolly as you please.

"That machine has broken down again, sir," said the foreman. "What shall I do?"

"Can't you make it work," asked Tom.

"No, I can't. It's a gone case I think. I wish you'd come out and look at it. We ought to have a new one, and that's a fact."

Now, it was no part of the programme for Tom to leave the office, but he was only too glad of the excuse.

"All right, Blackwell, I'll go," he said, and they left the office together.

As they crossed the mill yard they ran right into Colonel Todd, and two stylishly dressed gentlemen also, strangers in town.

They stared at Tom, but did not speak. Indeed, the colonel did not give them the chance.

"Where are you off to, Ben?" he demanded, abruptly. "I want to see you in the office right away."

"I was just going into the picking room with Mr. Blackwell, sir. That machine has broken down again."

"Oh! ah! yes! Well, you can't do any good. We'll have to buy a new one, I suppose."

"Well, I'll go and look at it."

"But I want you in the office."

"Oh, there's plenty of time, colonel. Plenty of time," said one of the gentlemen, pompously. "Recollect, we have those papers to look over first."

"Well, just as you say," replied the colonel, biting his lip. "Ben, you'll come right back?"

"Yes."

They walked away and Tom followed Mr. Blackwell, wondering who the two gentlemen could be.

If Blackwell knew he didn't mention it; when they reached the door of the mill he looked back.

Colonel Todd and his companions had gone into the office, but the silent man who had been reading the paper was lounging about the yard.

"Who's that fellow, Mr. Brandon?" Blackwell asked. "He was hanging round here all day yesterday?"

"I'm sure I don't know who he is," replied Tom, before he thought.

"Oh, I supposed you did. He's got a pass to go anywhere about the mill signed with your name. He was in my room this morning, and——"

"You'll have to ask Colonel Todd if you want to know," broke in Tom. "As long as he has the pass it's all right."

This put an end to the foreman's questions, and he led Tom to the machine.

Now, never in his life before had Tom seen a picking machine, but he was a natural born mechanic and a machine which wouldn't go to him was like a sick man to a doctor.

As he stood studying it he even forgot for the moment the perilous position in which he stood.

He made Blackwell start the picker and stop it again and again. He got down on his hands and knees and crawled in under it, remaining thus for a long time.

"I want a wrench!" he called out, suddenly.

Blackwell brought the wrench.

Tom had discovered the trouble. The whole mechanism was as plain as print to him now.

For ten minutes or more he worked with the wrench, and then called for a hammer.

Time slipped by, and Tom tinkered away.

All at once he crawled out and stood up.

"Now she'll go!" he exclaimed. "Start her up!"

"Well done, Ben! I was not aware that you added such a knowledge of mechanics to your other accomplishments,"

said a voice behind him. "Really you should have let us know this before."

There stood Colonel Todd and the two gentlemen.

Right behind them was the silent man. He seemed to be very busy studying the machine.

"Ha! Yes! Brandon, you seem to have forgotten me," said the pompous gentleman. "My name is Tracy—Tracy, of the Stewart Mills. You knew me well enough last week when we talked about the extension of the mortgage."

"I have not forgotten you, Mr. Tracey," stammered Tom. "I had the machine on my mind, you see."

"Yes, yes! Works first rate, don't it? I see no necessity for a new picker here, foreman."

"It's really wonderful, sir," stammered Blackwell. "I never supposed it could be done."

"Explain, Brandon," said Mr. Tracy. "How did you do it?"

"Tell him, Ben," said Colonel Todd.

This was a relief to Tom.

He launched out into a detailed explanation of the difficulty, winding up by assuring Mr. Tracy that the picker was perfectly capable of doing its work.

"Really, this is remarkable!" exclaimed the man from the Stewart Mills. "Why, I threw six of these pickers out of my place last week for the very same trouble. Do you suppose you could make them work like this?"

"I am sure I could, sir."

"Humph! Wish it was possible for you to try it."

"And why not?"

"Oh, ah—yes—er! You're a very skillful mechanic. Do you suppose you're skillful enough to blow a safe?"

"Sir!"

"Stop!" exclaimed Colonel Todd, in a hollow voice. "We may as well come out flat-footed, Mr. Tracy. Ben Brandon, you are discovered! You're defalcation is known! Oh, Ben, Ben! I never would have thought it! I've tried to be a good friend to you."

Colonel Todd's voice broke. He covered his face with his hands. Tears trickled between his fingers—crocodile tears.

"I don't know what you mean!" gasped Tom. "I——"

"Enough!" cried Tracy. "This is no time for sentiment. Young man, all is known. You have robbed the Woodville Mills of two hundred thousand dollars; it was you and your gang who burglarized the bank last night."

Tom turned as white as a sheet.

Where lies the difference between conscious innocence and conscious guilt, so far as outward appearances go?

Thrown off his guard by the magnitude of the accusation, Tom gasped out:

"It's false! It's a lie! I know who robbed the bank! I—but, oh, no one will believe me now! I am innocent! I can prove it! I——"

"You can prove it before the court, then," said Tracy, sneeringly. "Detective Adamson, do your duty. Arrest Ben Brandon! I charge him with robbing the Woodville bank."

By this time the whole picking room was up in arms.

Everybody expected to see the silent man spring forward and clap the handcuffs on Tom, for it was he whom Mr. Tracy addressed.

But to the general surprise—Colonel Todd was looking between his fingers without being able to squeeze out another tear—the silent man made no move.

"Very good, Mr. Tracy," he replied. "I'm ready to obey orders. I'll arrest Ben Brandon when I find him. That's what I'm here for, I believe."

"When you find him!" roared Tracy. "Great Heavens, man, who is this?"

"That?" said the detective, stroking his mustache, "oh, that's not Ben Brandon! That's Ben's brother in disguise."

CHAPTER XV.

"I AM TOM BRANDON; THAT'S MY BROTHER BEN!"

"What do you mean?" cried Colonel Todd, forgetting that he was overcome with grief. "Are you drunk or crazy, or what?"

"Neither one nor the other, sir," replied the detective, calmly. "I have simply spoken the truth."

"Rubbish! Rubbish! Don't I know Ben Brandon? Can I make any mistake about the scoundrel? Hasn't he ruined me? Do your duty, Adamson, and do it quick!"

Mr. Tracy looked puzzled; Detective Adamson remained unruffled; Tom was beginning to grow calm.

He saw the whole plot now, and he trembled for Ben. He was almost ready to deny his own identity on his brother's account and yet something seemed to tell him that he had better not do that.

"Keep cool! Keep cool!" he said to himself. "If you lose your head all is lost; keep cool and the left bower may yet win the game."

And Ben's brother listened to himself, and never opened his mouth nor made a move.

"Suppose—suppose you ask the young gentleman himself," said Tracy. "He hasn't denied that he is Ben."

"Are you Ben Brandon?" asked the detective, suddenly fixing his eagle eye on Tom.

"Ask Colonel Todd, he's running this business," was Tom's reply.

"Ah, I thought so!" said the detective, sneeringly.

"What do you mean, you young villain! you ingrate! you thief!" roared the great man of Woodville, shaking his fist in Tom's face. "Have you the sublime impudence to—to—"

"Yes, he has," broke in the detective, "and don't you dare to lay a hand on him. Mr. Tracy, I'm working for you. Shall I arrest this young man?"

"Yes," said Tracy.

"Very good. Brandon, you are under arrest. Now, then, gentlemen, a word with you. I know my business. I don't make mistakes. Come with me to Tom Brandon's bicycle shop up on Main street. I'll bet you one hundred dollars to five that you won't find him there."

Colonel Todd protested and Tracy talked. The wrangle lasted some minutes, and then the detective brought it to an end by saying:

"You'll do it or I'll throw up the case."

And this was the explanation of the little procession which walked across the Common toward Tom's humble shop.

Colonel Todd wanted the detective to handcuff Tom, but the detective never even answered him, and the colonel held his tongue after that.

Probably none of those they met suspected the true situation.

In silence the party walked along Main street until they came to Tom's shop.

Just before they reached it, Jennie Todd rode past in her pony phaeton.

Tom lifted his hat to her politely, and Jennie bowed.

How the colonel glared at him!

But silence was the programme, and he never said a word until just before they came to Tom's door.

"Bet you a hundred dollars to fifty that you find Ben's brother tinkering wheels!" he suddenly said to the detective.

"I'll take the bet," replied Adamson, and then as they came abreast the door he started back, exclaiming:

"Lost, by thunder! But no, I don't give up yet!"

Sure enough, there was a young man in his shirt sleeves kneeling down beside a bike, oiling the machine.

It was Ben!

Tom's heart almost stood still, for he saw that his brother wore his discarded suit, which had been left in the locker of the club room.

"It's all a plot!" flashed over him. "Colonel Todd means to save Ben and sacrifice me."

Was Jennie in the evil scheme, too?

Tom thought so then. His confidence was shaken all to pieces.

"I must look out for myself," he thought. "If I don't, I'll land in jail."

Ben sprang up.

"Well, gentlemen, what can I do for you? Want to buy a wheel?" he said, perfectly imitating Tom's hearty way.

"What do you say now?" sneered Colonel Todd. "A word with you, Tom Brandon. Your brother is under arrest. He claims that he is not Ben, but—"

"Stop!" said Tom. "I claim nothing, Colonel Todd. I leave it all to you and this gentlemen here."

Tom's voice trembled as he pointed his finger at Ben.

"Why, Tom! What does all this mean?" gasped Ben. "Arrested! For what?"

"Are you Ben Brandon, or are you Tom Brandon? Speak! tell the truth!" cried the detective, looking straight in Ben's eye.

"I am Tom Brandon! That's my brother Ben!"

"Then I say you're a liar and a sneak!" said the detective, pointing his finger at Ben.

"Look out!" cried Colonel Todd.

But he spoke too late.

With a sudden spring Tom darted out the door.

Leaning against the side of the shanty was his own wheel.

Colonel Todd tried to grab him, but he went down all in a heap before one well directed blow from Tom's clinched fist.

"Stop him! Stop him!" roared Mr. Tracy.

But Tom was on his wheel now, flying up Main street like the wind.

CHAPTER XVI.

"BROTHER SHOULD NEVER SPEAK AGAINST BROTHER."

Tom Brandon acted under a sudden impulse in running away on his wheel.

Perhaps he made a mistake; perhaps it would have been better if he stood his ground.

But when he realized the full extent of Ben's treachery, it seemed to him as though the jail-doors stood wide open before him.

"As long as I'm free I have a chance to do something; but, if they lock me up, there's no telling what the end of this may be," was the thought which came to him.

And this was what made Tom run away.

"Confound the little snoozer!" cried Detective Adamson. "We want that boy! We must have him! Mr. Tracy, what is to be done?"

"Go after him! Get him! What do you stand here for? Can I ride a wheel? Can I chase the wind?" the millionaire owner of the Stewart Mill exclaimed.

"But this other fellow! I tell you he is Ben Brandon, and not the one who is gone."

"Rubbish! Don't Colonel Todd know? Don't he know himself? Mr. Adamson, you are acting like an idiot! After the thief while there is yet time; if you are the wheelman you told me you was, you ought to have no difficulty in coming up with him."

Detective Adamson never said another word.

Seizing one of the new Buffalo wheels, he lifted it out of the shop, and springing upon it, rode away, leaving Mr. Tracy storming about the little shop.

"Let's get back to the mill," said Tracy, after a moment.

"When Adamson catches the fellow I suppose he'll bring him there. Someone's got to make good the mortgage, or I shall foreclose on the Woodville Mills. Then you can hunt your own defaulters. After all, it's none of my affair."

They hurried out of the shop together, the colonel looking very much disturbed.

And Ben, with his face as white as a sheet, turned to wait on a customer who had just come in to buy cigars.

Meanwhile, Tom was not giving the grass time to grow under his wheel—of that you can be very sure.

He turned one corner after another, doubling through the alleys and getting back on to Main street above the shop.

Those who saw him must have thought that Ben Brandon had taken leave of his senses.

But Tom looked at nobody; he had fully made up his mind not to go back, and consequently all he thought of was how to get away.

With this end in view, Tom did the wisest thing possible when he came back on Main street, for now he turned in the opposite direction.

Instead of going down street he went up, and every turn of the wheel took him further away from the settled part of Woodville.

In a few moments he was beyond the houses, and here he turned into a by-road which, if followed, would take him to Overtop.

And this was part of Tom's scheme.

There was one man whom he wanted to see—felt that he must see.

It was Herman the Hermit.

"He's got to tell me what he knows or there'll be trouble," thought Tom. "I'm going straight for the hut."

Old Herman sat on a bench by the doorway, with his dogs lying stretched at his feet, as Tom reached the hut.

They sprang up, barking furiously as Tom approached.

This aroused the old man, and he arose and shading his eyes with his hand stared at Tom.

"Ha, Ben! So you've come again," he said. "I've been looking for you. Are the detectives after you? I told you how it would be."

Tom sprang from his wheel and leaned it against the side of the hut.

"It's Tom—not Ben," he said.

"Tom! In Ben's clothes. Yes, you are right. There is a difference between you two. I know it. You've got a mole to the left of your nose—Ben has none. You are Tom! Well, well! How did it work, boy? Wow did it work?"

"I've got the money," said Tom. "What am I to do? You started me on this, you must help me out—that's why I'm here. I know that Colonel Todd is a scoundrel and that my brother is a coward and a thief."

"Stop!" cried the hermit, holding up his hand. "Brother should never speak against brother. You know a little, but you don't know all. Ben is a coward, but he is not a thief."

"Thank Heaven for that!"

"Ha! You love your brother in spite of the way he has used you. Good! It is right. I loved my brother, too. He was your father and Ben's. Brother against brother—no, that won't do. You did well to come to me, Tom Brandon. If I can help you, I will."

CHAPTER XVII.

BACK TO THE SHOP TO FIGHT IT OUT.

Tom started at the hermit in wonder.

"Are you really my uncle?" he gasped.

"I am," replied the hermit. "Look at me, Tom Brandon. What I am, Colonel Todd made me. He robbed me of my farm—it was the old homestead where your father and I were

born—where you were born and Ben was born, and your father and mother died. He drove me to drink and madness. He would have killed me if he had dared. Tom, that man's fortune rose from the wreck of ours. He got me in his clutches and ruined me, plausible schemer that he is! But enough of this. It all happened long ago, and the law protects him in what he did when he foreclosed the mortgage on the old place, and drove me out into the world. Tell your story, Tom, and then I can advise, for I am not mad now, as everybody believes. No, no! my wits are keen enough when it comes to protecting my brother's boys from the meanest scoundrel who ever went unhung."

Tom was so overcome with surprise and excitement, that it was all he could do to control himself while he told the old story of what had happened since the night of the bank robbery.

Old Herman listened to every word with deep attention.

"So, so! His daughter got wind of it. I'm sorry for her, and for the poor mother—a good woman, Tom, and Jennie is a good girl. She has found out her father and she would save him, but Ben must not be sacrificed in spite of his cowardice, for he is a coward—has been right along. You and I must try to save him from himself and from that man."

"How?" cried Tom. "If you will tell me what to do I will do it—I will do anything."

"Stop, boy! I'm going to tell you all now, and I shall tell it in a few words. Don't be too hard on Ben. He is a smart fellow, but he is not the bright boy you are. His mind moves slowly, and when he gets ready to act it is too late. Colonel Todd took a fancy to him, and took him into the mill where he advanced him rapidly—more rapidly than was safe for a boy of his age; but for that he had his reasons; can you guess what they were?"

"My guess would be to make him do his dirty work."

"To make him a scapegoat for his dirty work—that was it. Tom, Colonel Todd is a thief and a defaulter. He has sunk the bulk of the capital of the Woodville Mills in stock speculation if I know anything, and ruin stares him in the face; in order to avert it he conceived the idea of robbing the Woodville bank, intending to use the money to make good the mortgage which Mr. Tracy holds on the mill."

"I have guessed all that," said Tom, "but Ben must have known it. Ben was to have been there."

"Ben does not know it. Faithful to his employer and believing it his duty to help him, Ben consented to do his dirty work; it was he who hired three professional burglars to blow the safe; he was to receive the money, make off with it, and give it back to the colonel later. Why he did this will be plain enough when I tell you that Colonel Todd holds him in his power. Tom, there was money to be raised once before, and this man induced Ben to sign the name of the mill directors now traveling abroad to a note for a large sum. Forgery! Oh, yes! That's what it was; the day before the note was to come due the mill office burned and if the books had been destroyed as was intended, payment on the note could have been postponed for certain reasons which I cannot fully explain. Now you begin to see daylight, Tom, and understand how weak your brother has been. Ben is a forger, but not a thief, for he never profited by all his villainy to the amount of a single cent."

"And who told you all this?" asked Tom, hollowly, for he was terribly disturbed by these startling revelations, as may be well imagined.

"Ben, himself," replied the hermit. "In his trouble he came to me."

"Then he knew you all along?"

"Oh, yes."

"Why didn't you tell me who you were when I met you

before? You surely know I was in town. Why didn't you let me know that—"

"That you had an uncle living in this hut? That poor old crazy Herman was your father's brother? No, no, Tom! I have some pride left. I didn't want to disgrace you. It was bad enough to have Ben pass me on the street without having you do the same; but, enough of this. You want my advice. I'm going to give it. Ben must be saved, and you alone can do it. Take that money and carry it to Mr. Bodine, the mayor of Woodville, and tell him all, but first give Ben time to get out of town."

"Stop! Why did you tell me to listen to Jennie Todd! Does she know all?"

"Everything. If she could have done it without sacrificing her father, she would have saved Ben that night. It was she who delayed his coming, and she did it to save him. You see, Tom, Ben made a clean breast of it to the old uncle. He loves Jennie and she loves him, but she fears for her father. Poor girl! She is between two fires—but we must hesitate no longer; every promise Colonel Todd made has been broken. And he would have sacrificed Ben without mercy; but when he found that he could just as well sacrifice you and save Ben he grasped at the chance, for Ben still remains in his power and Ben knows his secrets and you don't. I think I have made it all plain."

Too plain!

Bitter feelings filled Tom Brandon's mind as he rode down the mountain.

"I'm going back to the shop, and I'm going to stay there, Ben or no Ben," he determined. "I won't be driven out of town."

"I'll face the music, whatever it is," he thought; "but I'm going to sail under my own colors. I'm Ben's brother, and not Ben."

Scarcely had the thought crossed his mind, when the well remembered pony phaeton came rattling up to the door.

Tom's heart was in his throat in an instant.

For Jennie Todd stepped from the phaeton and came hurrying into the shop.

"Ben!" she said, in a frightened whisper. "Shut the door. I must speak to you, Ben."

CHAPTER XVIII.

"I'LL DO IT IF IT TAKES ME TO MY DEATH."

"Tom's sudden resolution was blown to the four winds.

He stared at Jennie and never said a word, for try as he would, he could not muster up courage to undeceive her.

"Ben!" cried the girl, "it's a shame! It's wicked. I warned you! I told you my father's plot against you. I gave you time to get out of town. I saved you from him—from yourself. I kept you from being a thief—do you know why I did all this?"

"Because you loved me, I suppose," said Tom, in the same strained voice.

"Loved you! Never! I promised to marry you because my father forced me to it. No, Ben, I never loved you, but I would save you yet, for your brother's sake, in spite of the meanness you have been guilty of this day. You would have stood by and seen Tom arrested."

Here was more mystery. Tom was puzzled. But he had one final question to put.

"And what would you do with Tom?" he asked.

"What! Can you ask? Save him from the trouble I have got him into; save him from prison and disgrace, from my father's treachery, from—from——"

"Jennie! Don't you know me?"

Tom held out both hands to the weeping girl.

"Tom!"

"Oh, Jennie!"

It was well that the store door was shut and the curtain down again.

Jennie knew him now, and Tom knew that he had no rival in Ben!

It was half an hour before the little shop opened again.

Jennie was gone then.

Tom parted with her at the back door, within ten minutes after the disclosure.

"Do it, Tom! Do it," were her last words before she left.

And Tom pressed her hand firmly.

"I will, Jennie. If I am spared. I'll do it just as you say."

The first person in after Tom opened the door was Jack Ashman.

"Hello, Tom!" he cried. "By gracious, I thought you'd given me the shake. Do you know what everybody is talking about all over town?"

"I'm sure I don't, Jack. I've been busy. Looked for you all day, old man."

"I oughtn't to have come after the way you used me last night," said Jack, in an aggrieved tone. "Oh, there's a pretty mess following in the wake of this bank robbery, but you must know."

"Know what?"

"Why, they say that Colonel Todd has been robbed of a million and Ben did it. He's run away they say. Tom, I met him riding toward Overtop on a bike, this morning. Wisht I'd known it then. He took me for you and tried to pump me, but I never gave myself away."

"What would you have done if you had known it, Jack? Let him go for my sake."

"No, sir! I'd a collared him? Ben is no friend of yours, Tom Brandon, and you know that just as well as I do. But, say, ain't you going to tell what happened after I left last night? I'm dying with curiosity to know the truth about all this."

"Meet me here at midnight and come alone."

"Well, all right. I can't refuse you, Tom, but I tell you what, we all stand a good chance of running up against Woodville jail unless this thing stops soon."

"Midnight, Jack. Remember your promise. No more now—we'll talk wheel."

And Tom knew that Jack Ashman was a true friend, and could be depended upon.

Thus Tom had given his promise to Jennie, and Jack had given his to Tom.

And the promise was just the same.

Tom knew no more what it meant than Jack.

What was to be the end?

Fortunately for Tom, Percy Wiman came in just then and brought a friend to talk wheel.

Tom sold him a Buffalo, and they had scarcely gone before a stranger came in and bought another.

At ten o'clock Tom closed up, and threw himself down on the old lounge in his clothes.

But he could not sleep—it was just impossible.

The church clock struck eleven, and he heard it.

He sprang to his feet, and was about to strike a light, when there came a low tap on the back door.

"That you, Jack?" called Tom, through the keyhole.

"No! It is I," came the reply from outside.

Tom opened the door softly.

When he closed it again, Jennie Todd, wrapped in an old water-proof cloak, stood beside him in the shop.

"Are you ready?" she whispered.

"All ready, Jennie. I'll do it—if it takes me to my death."

CHAPTER XIX.

MORE MIDNIGHT WORK

Tom Brandon had undertaken a very dangerous piece of business, as we are now about to show.

He consented to do it, partly for Ben's sake, and because he felt that it was right, but principally for Jennie's sake, and because she wanted him to do it, for there is no denying that Tom was head and ears in love with the daughter of Woodville's great man—the man who would have ruined him for life, by sending him to jail.

As soon as he and Jennie got outside the shop, Tom opened the door of a little shed where he stored his old wheels, and took out two new Buffaloes. He had put them in there earlier in the evening, so as to have them ready for this very emergency.

"Whoever catches on these will do well, Jennie," he whispered. "You better leave your own wheel here. It's a good one, but not as good as the one you are going to ride now."

"I'm entirely in your hands, Tom," was the reply. "I have fully made up my mind to do whatever you say."

"I don't think we can do better than to carry out our original plan, Jennie—I don't really. It is a good one; it's yours, not mine."

"It's going to kill me, Tom. It's going to break up the old life forever. Heaven knows what will become of me, or of my poor mother but it must be done."

"I shall look out for your mother and for you too," said Tom, steadily, "if Colonel Todd will only go away and not trouble us."

"He will! He'll have to! Tom, I'm not—what's that?"

A low whistle was heard around in front of the shop.

"It's Jack," breathed Tom. He whistled in answer.

"Don't let him question me, Tom—don't. I can't have it."

"He shan't," said Tom. "Jennie, you just keep quiet, don't say a word—don't worry. Do as you said. Leave it all to me."

"Hello, Tom," whispered Jack, coming around the corner of the shop. "Oh, here you are, are you? Good evening, Miss Todd."

Jack was rather stiff in his way of saying it.

"I want to thank you ever so much for what you did for me the other night, Mr. Ashman," said Jennie, holding out her hand. "You don't know how great a favor you did me, but you will, some day, and then you will understand how much obliged I really am."

"Oh, you needn't say anything about it, Miss Todd," replied Jack, blushing to the roots of his hair. "I'm only a plain fellow, and I want to be plain with you. I went with Tom because he asked me, and I went away that time because he asked me, and it's for the same reason I'm here to-night."

"You'll stand by us, Jack? That's all we ask of you," put in Tom.

"I will, to the last gasp, old man."

"That's enough. I can't ask any more. You've got your wheel, of course, Jack?"

"Certain. It's round in front."

"Then we may as well start right off. I don't see any use hanging around here another minute."

"Might I ask where we are going?" said Jack. "I think at least I ought to be allowed to know that."

"We are going away up on the Lawrenceville road," replied Tom. "Do you know where the old Taylor place is?"

"Of course, I do."

"That's where we are going."

"But there's nobody living on the Taylor place—hasn't been this two years. The house is shut up and is all going to rack and ruin."

"We'll find someone there to-night, Jack," said Jennie, gently.

They mounted their wheels and rode off.

Tom and his companions went bowling along the road, anxious only to reach their destination unseen.

Again and again Tom looked back to see if they were being followed.

He could not discover any one, and yet for all that someone was there.

That someone was a man, also mounted on a new Buffalo wheel.

It was the one Tom had sold to the stranger the afternoon before.

The rider kept in under the shadow of the trees on the left. The moon was on that side, too.

It made the right side of the road almost as bright as day, but the left side was thrown completely in the shadow.

Thus the wheelman was able to keep out of sight and, as he was a first-class rider, he soon began picking up on Tom and his party.

When they came in sight of the Taylor place Tom turned abruptly into a wood road.

"What's to be done?" asked Jack.

"You stay here with Jennie. I'm going down to the house and see how the land lies. I'll be right back."

The old Taylor place was located right on the side of the mountain. The house was an ancient affair, and stood on a broad terrace about fifty feet up from the road.

It was an ancient looking structure with a broad veranda on three sides of it, which was built out from the second story in front, but came on a level with the ground in the rear.

This arrangement, it will be seen, gave room for a basement underneath on the side toward the road. There was such a basement. It opened directly on the road and behind the shutters a glimmer of light could be seen as Tom came through the yard in the rear.

"They are there," he murmured. "Someone's there! I must see at once who it is."

He started for the veranda when suddenly he heard footsteps behind him.

Tom's heart was in his mouth as he faced around and saw two dark shadows creeping towards him among the trees.

He stooped down and picked up a stone, and stood there watching the shadows as they approached.

CHAPTER XX.

BROTHER AGAINST BROTHER

"Tom! Tom!"

Suddenly Tom heard his name whispered in the darkness.

He threw away the stone, then, for it was only Jennie and Jack.

"What did you come for?" he gasped.

"I came because she wouldn't stay," said Jack. "Don't be mad, Tom."

"Jennie, this isn't fair."

"Don't say a word. No harm will come to me. Remember, it's all for my sake and Ben's, and we've both got to do our part the best way we can."

As he said this, Jennie walked right on down the hill, and

the boys saw her tap on the shutter of the basement window. "Jack, if anything happens to her I shall never forgive myself," groaned Tom; "but come on. We've just got to do it her way."

They went up on the veranda, and as noiselessly as possible climbed in at one of the windows of the second story.

It was as dark as pitch in the room, all but in one place; this was over in one corner where there was a hole in the floor, where in some past time a stove pipe had been set for the purpose of heating this room from the one below.

Tom tip-toed to the hole, leaving Jack to watch at the window.

Tom laid down flat and peered through the hole.

He could see Jennie sitting beside a table, but he could not see Colonel Todd, although there was no doubt about his being there, for he could distinctly hear his voice when he said:

"What in the world did you follow me here for, girl? Didn't I warn you? I tell you we are in the greatest danger. Tracy is dead onto me. I shall be arrested to-morrow beyond a doubt if I show myself at the mill or on the street. Even now detectives may be watching me. Jennie, you may have ruined all if any one has seen you and followed you here."

Then Jennie answered, and her voice was clear and firm:

"Father, I came here to make one last appeal to you. Give it up. Be honest. Mother and I will gladly give up everything and go away with you. We will begin again somewhere else where no one knows us. You have, according to your own admission, made money enough by that last lucky turn in stocks to meet every obligation. Give it up. Pay Mr. Tracy and the rest this money, and——"

"Stop, girl!" interrupted Colonel Todd, fiercely. "You don't know what you ask. I'll never make myself a beggar! Never! Never! Let Tracy take the old mill and make the most of what there is left. This money has come to me in the nick of time, and I am going to Mexico, and you and your mother are going with me. Then Ben and I will build up another future. When that's done, I'll talk about paying, and not before."

"And Tom Brandon! What of him?" said Jennie, steadily.

"What of him? Why, he'll be caught sooner or later and sent to the penitentiary."

For a moment there was silence.

Then Jennie spoke again.

"Is Ben coming here to-night, father?"

"Yes; I expect him any moment."

"And you are going to give him the money?"

"Yes. He'll take it to New York and meet me on board the steamer. Of course, he'll be dressed like Tom. Even if he is seen, no one will suspect him. I shall cross the mountain on foot. Old Herman the Hermit will guide me, for he thinks I am going to save his nephew from imprisonment and disgrace."

"Father, this is a wicked scheme."

"Jennie, it is right. More than that, it has got to be."

"If it has got to be, the sooner the better."

"That's right! Spoken like my own daughter," said the colonel.

But Tom did not hear that.

Tom was gone.

He had received his cue and had moved away from the hole.

"Jack, you follow Jennie and me when we come out," he whispered. "If Colonel Todd comes out of this house and attempts to follow us, watch him."

Tom stole down the hill and passed in under the veranda.

At the same instant a dark form stepped out from the

shadow of one of the pillars which supported the veranda floor above.

"Ben!" gasped Tom.

The shadow drew back.

"Tom! For Heaven's sake, what brings you here?"

"To save you, Ben."

It was brother against brother!

There they stood, facing each other under the projecting roof.

CHAPTER XXI.

HELD UP ON THE LAWRENCEVILLE ROAD

"Too late!" said Ben, in a low, trembling voice. "It's too late to save me now. Tom, go, or you'll be killed!"

"No, Ben; I have work to do here."

"Oh, Tom, can you ever forgive me for my meanness—for what I did to you to-day?"

"I can, for you are my brother; but it was mean for you to claim to be the brother you so despised."

Ben caught Tom by the arm, and whispered in a broken voice:

"I had to, Tom—I had to. You don't know all I've been through. I couldn't go to prison. Oh, Tom, if you had only never saved those books! If you had only given me the one you brought away. Nothing but the little red book will save me now, Tom."

"I'd give it to you freely if I had it, Ben, but I know no more where it went to than you do."

"And the bank money, Tom. If you'll give that up I may yet be saved. I have never told Todd that you took it. He thinks I've got it still, and he has me in his power. He's inside there now, Tom."

"I know it! I tell you I know all. Ben, it's no use talking. You were a party to the plot to betray me. You must have been; but I've escaped—escaped to save you. Ben, you were to meet the colonel here to-night. You are to take money from him and go to New York to meet him again on the Mexican steamer and give it up. You are not going in there at all, Ben. I am going in and you are to wait here. Then you are going with me, and we'll turn all the money over to Mr. Tracy. The Brandons may be poor, Ben, but they are honest. Don't you raise a finger to stop me, for that's what I'm going to do."

"Then go! Do what you say, and I'll bless you forever, for by doing it you will save me from this man."

There could be no doubt of Ben's sincerity; but even admitting a doubt, Tom was willing to take big chances on that score.

"Stay right where you are," he whispered and without the least hesitation he tapped lightly on the shutter as he had seen Jennie do.

Instantly he heard Colonel Todd get up and turn the key.

"Come in, Ben," he called, as he opened the door.

Tom stepped in and the door was closed behind him.

He started back with well assumed astonishment when he saw Jennie sitting quietly there by the table.

"Jennie! You here!" he exclaimed.

"Yes, she's here and it's all right; she's with us now," said the colonel.

"I'm glad to hear it," said Tom. "Colonel, I'm all ready, and the sooner we close this thing the better."

"We can close it right now," said the colonel. "Did you come on your wheel?"

"Yes."

"Anything been heard of your brother?"

"Not that I've heard. I've been in the shop all the afternoon."

"That was a shrewd move, Ben, and it's what saved us! Now, I'm going to give you the money, for I don't dare to run the risk of having it found on me in case I should be captured. You know what I've promised you! Be true to me, Ben, and you're a made man. We'll shake the dust of Woodville off our feet. In Mexico, with the capital we have, we shall be able to make a million in two years' time."

"And my brother, colonel!" said Tom, in a low voice. "It seems rather hard about him."

"Pshaw! what nonsense! You scarcely know him. He's young, and will come out of it all right. Once he has served his term we'll bring him down to Mexico to join us, and make his fortune, too."

After that Tom never hesitated.

It was not necessary to say anything more or he might have betrayed himself.

Colonel Todd seemed to have perfect confidence in his power over him, for he now arose, and stooping down at the hearth, raised the stone.

From under it he took a long fat pocket-book, and handed it over to Tom.

"Here it is, Ben," he said. "There is ninety-six thousand dollars in it. That and the bank money will make two hundred and fifty thousand—a splendid capital—all what we shall need."

Tom put the pocket-book inside his vest.

"Of course you paid Duffet and Hending their share?" the colonel asked.

Tom nodded.

"Now be off," said the colonel; "and, Jennie, you go with him. Be careful, Ben—very careful. If you are attacked, shoot to kill. I shall wait for Herman the Hermit, here."

All this time Jennie had never spoken a word.

The colonel threw open the door and they went out.

Tom could not speak. He took Jennie's arm and hurried her toward the woods, Jack Ashman following.

Where was Ben?

Tom had expected that he would join them, but he did not.

Evidently Ben had again played the cowardly part and run away.

"Is everything O. K.?" asked Jack in a whisper as they came out upon the wood road where they had left their wheels.

"It's all right," said Tom, "it is just the way we wanted it. You didn't see or hear anything, Jack?"

"Not a thing."

"Then we may as well go back. Jennie, we'll see you to the house, of course."

"No, Tom!"

"Where then?"

"We go directly to Stewartville after leaving the shop."

"I understand. Until we have seen Mr. Tracy, you can't rest."

"Am I not right?"

"You are. It is the only way."

They mounted their wheels, and were soon flying down the Lawrenceville road.

Scarcely had they gone a quarter of a mile, when three men suddenly sprang out of the woods and planted themselves across the road.

It was the man in the black cloak and the bank burglars.

"Halt, Ben Brandon!" cried the former, and each raised a cocked revolver.

"Don't forget, Brother Duffett!" hissed the man in the black cloak. "You've got the boodle. We want our share, or we'll have your life!"

CHAPTER XXII.

THE LITTLE RED BOOK

Biff! Whack! Bang!

Three more astonished men than those who tried to hold up Tom Brandon, Jack Ashman and Jennie Todd on the Lawrenceville road, it would have been hard to find.

Only one shot was fired at the time.

This was by the man in the black cloak at the moment Tom's wheel struck him. It flew harmlessly into the air, and the boys and Jennie went flying on.

"They're after us!" called Jack, who had turned to look back along the road.

"You're right," said Tom, turning his eyes in the same direction, for dark shadows could be seen moving along by the wall which enclosed the Chadwick farm.

"They've got wheels, too," said Jennie. "Oh, what shall we do?"

"Do? Why, go faster!" cried Tom.

Probably the three roughs saw how the case stood, for they were soon left far behind, and were nowhere to be seen when Tom and his companions struck the upper end of Main street. Woodville wore its usual quiet air by night.

Not a soul was met on the street up to the moment when they turned in behind Tom's little shop.

"Done, and well done," breathed Tom, jumping off his wheel. "Thank you, Jack, a thousand times."

"And I thank you, too, Jack," said Jennie. "You don't know the service you have done me this night."

"I don't know nothing about the business, and I don't know as I want to," said Jack. "Are we through now, or is there more of this sort of work to be done?"

"Jack, there's more," said Tom, as he proceeded to open the door. "Jennie and I have to go over to Stewartville. We start in a few moments. If you will go with us I needn't say that I shall be ever and ever so much obliged."

"I'll go," said Jack, promptly, "but I must say I think I have earned the right to know what all this means."

"I think so, too," said Tom. "Jennie, we must tell Jack."

"If you say so, Tom—but it's a bitter pill to me."

"Then it shan't be," said Jack, promptly. "I'll go it blind. I suppose I shall know sooner or later?"

"Indeed you will," said Jennie. "Jack, I'll tell you this much. My father is not the man you and everyone in Woodville believe him to be, he is a scoundrel!"

"Hold on!" broke in Jack. "I don't want to hear any more. I suspected your father was in the Taylor House to-night—was it so?"

"Yes."

"And Ben was there, too?"

"Yes," said Tom, "Ben was there, too."

"That's enough. These are family matters, and what I don't know I can't tell. I'll go to Stewartville—don't say another word."

"Bless your kind heart, Jack Ashman," said Jennie, weeping; "the day may come when I shall be able to thank you as you deserve."

"Don't want any thanks," said Jack. "Tom, what in thunder are you about now?"

"Watch me and see," said Tom, who had pulled away the old sofa and was beginning to raise the floor boards beneath.

"Is that where you put it?" asked Jennie. "Oh, what if Ben has been here before you, Tom?"

"He hasn't," said Tom. "Don't you fret. This is absolutely as I left it. Here you are! Hold the light, Jack."

Up came the board and Tom bent over the hole.

He drew out the black grip all right—it was there undisturbed.

"Thank Heaven!" cried Jennie. "Oh, what a load this lifts from my mind! But I shan't be able to breathe freely, Tom, until I have seen it safe in Mr. Tracy's hands."

Instead of replying, Tom gave a sharp exclamation of astonishment.

He bent down further, and pulled out a little red book.

"Great Heavens, here it is!" he cried. "It must have dropped down behind the old sofa, and gone in between the baseboard and the floor through this big crack."

"What is it?" asked Jennie, who, of course, had never heard of the little red book.

But Tom did not answer.

Bending over toward the light, he hurriedly turned over the leaves of the little red book and scanned what was written upon them.

"Ben is saved!" he cried. "This proves his innocence! But, oh, Jennie, I'm sorry for you!"

"Sorry for me, Tom! What now?"

"Your father——"

"Stop! I have no father. I know now why he feared Ben so long. Father's confession is in that book."

"It is, Jennie—in his own handwriting over his own signature."

"Thank Heaven! Keep the book, Tom! Save your brother! I want nothing more than to have the whole truth made known to the world!"

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE ARREST ON THE STEWARTVILLE ROAD

"Are we all ready—shall we start now?"

"The sooner the better. We've got a long ride before us. I say don't let's lose a moment, Tom."

Jennie was very decided in her way of speaking.

"We'll start for Stewartville at once then," said Tom. "It is only half-past three, and we ought easily to get there by five o'clock. Jack, remember one thing. You are only to go with us as far as Mr. Tracy's house. We may be arrested, and you are not in on that deal, and mustn't be. On this point I insist."

They started away from the shop a few moments later.

Still there was no one to be seen on Main street, and yet the watchman ought to have been somewhere around.

As they turned off on the Stewartville road they met a farmer's wagon.

"Hello!" called the driver, "where are you folks off for so early? Have you heard the news?"

Tom was going right by, but something suddenly seemed to prompt him to listen to this man.

"What news?" he asked, jumping off his wheel. "We are going over to Stewartville; we have to catch the early train."

"Why, they say old man Todd was captured on the mountain by detectives, and three other fellers have been taken up for the bank robbery. Talk is that he helped rob the bank, and Ben Brandon was in it, too. I belong up to Lundy, and I heard it as I came through Bastow. A dective named Adamson arrested Todd. They say he's taking him to Stewartville; they passed through Bastow just as I came along."

Poor Jennie!

She almost fainted.

But Tom helped her on her wheel and away they went, no one answering the farmer by so much as a word.

They rode on in silence, and had almost reached Bastow, when, while passing through a strip of woods, Jack suddenly called out that they were being followed by three men.

They came out of the woods suddenly, turning in behind our party, flying toward them on wheels like the wind.

"The burglars!" gasped Tom, looking back when Jack gave the shout.

"Halt there!" called the foremost of the party. "Halt, Ben Brandon, or I fire!"

"On, Jennie! On!" gasped Tom, bending low over his wheel. A shot whistled over his head. Then another came.

"Halt!" cried other voices ahead of them.

To their dismay a dozen men sprang out of the woods ahead.

They were armed with revolvers, and stretched themselves across the road.

There was no help for it!

Tom dropped off his wheel, Jennie and Jack followed his example.

The men rushed forward and seized them.

It was a slim young fellow with a hawk nose who laid his hand on Tom.

"I arrest you, Ben Brandon, in the name of the law!" he said, sternly. "You are charged with robbing the Woodville bank."

CHAPTER XXIV.

CONCLUSION

Positively Tom Brandon was never more startled in his life, nor more thoroughly surprised.

"Who are you?" he demanded. "What is your authority for this?"

Brave Tom!

Even to save himself he would not deny that he was Ben. But Jennie had no such scruples.

"You're making a mistake, sir," she said. "This is not Ben Brandon—this is Ben's brother; he is as honest a young man as there is in Woodville, I can prove what I say."

"Miss Jennie Todd, I believe," said the young detective, sneeringly, raising his hat with much politeness. "Oh, I understand my business! You want my authority? Here, look at my shield. I am a Pinkerton detective, and these gentlemen are my assistants. We've been waiting for you. I may include you in the arrest."

"Be civil, whatever else you do," said Tom. "This young lady is not to be insulted by you or any one else."

They crowded about him, but it was not necessary to handcuff him, as they did, for, of course, there was no possible chance for Tom to get away.

Of course they opened the grip, and equally of course they found the money there.

Matters began to look black for Tom.

Just then a horse and wagon came rattling around the turn of the road.

"We've got them!" cried McGurgle. "It's all right, Mr. Adamson. They came along just as you said."

It was Detective Adamson, sure enough, and there was Mr. Tracy with him in the buggy.

"The money! Have you got the money?" cried the old mill owner.

"We have!" said McGurgle, proudly. "It is all here."

Adamson leaped out of the wagon and flashed his dark lantern in Tom's face.

"Huh! Sold again!" he cried. "It's Ben's brother, Mr. Tracy—not Ben!"

Tom bit his lip and never said a word.

Strange thoughts were flying through his head—strange, considering the way he had been treated by his brother, but noble thoughts—thoughts which would not have been entertained by one boy in a thousand.

But Tom was Tom, and not Ben.

"Are you sure?" asked Tracy, getting out. "We've got Todd and the burglars all right, and we want his accomplice. We mustn't make a mistake. Ah, Miss Jennie! Dear me—dear me! This is sad! Are you in it, too?"

"Stop, Mr. Tracy!" cried the girl, drawing herself up proudly. "I am innocent of all wrong. So is this young man, who is Tom Brandon, and not Ben Brandon, just as Mr. Adamson says. It seems a strange time and place to tell my story, but I am going to do it, and you must hear me. We were on our way to your house when we were captured. If we had reached you this money would have been placed in your hands."

Thus Jennie began, and she never stopped until she had told all.

She did not spare her father. She told how she had accidentally overheard him plotting with Ben to carry out the robbery, how Ben had resisted, how the colonel exercised his power over him and made him consent; how she had spoiled the scheme by bringing Tom on the scene just at the right time. All this and all that subsequently occurred the brave girl told, and her story bore on its face the stamp of truth.

"Now then, Mr. Tracy, if this matter rests with you, do with us as you think best," she wound up by saying. "You have got the bank money, you shall now have the money for your mortgage and some over. It is the money my father gave Tom Brandon to take to him on board the Mexican steamer, believing him to be Ben. Give it to him, Tom. At last we shall see this great wrong righted. What may happen to me afterward I neither know nor care."

"Jennie," said Mr. Tracy, "let me say right here that you are a brave girl and an honest one. As for you, young Brandon, I respect you, too, and will endeavor to see you righted, but your brother is a scoundrel, and if he is captured the law must take its course."

Without a word Tom drew out the pocket-book and placed it in Mr. Tracy's hands.

The old mill owner hastily ran over its contents, exclaiming:

"Why, there's more than will satisfy my claim here, but I am sorry to tell you, Miss Jennie, that there are other debts hanging over the Woodville mill. I'm afraid——"

"Stop!" said Mr. Adamson. "We've got nothing to do with the other debts of the Woodville mill. What about this young man?"

"Take the handcuffs off," said Mr. Tracy. "We cannot arrest Tom Brandon after what we have heard."

"Wouldn't it be well enough to ask him his name," growled McGurgle.

Then Tom spoke.

"It ain't necessary, gentlemen. I'll tell my name. I am Ben Brandon—not Tom."

A young man, bareheaded, with torn clothes, and a wild, hunted look upon his face, stepped out of the woods into their midst.

"Take me!" he cried. "Send me to prison for life, if you will. I'll not go back on my brother! I am Ben!"

* * * * *

When Colonel Todd and the burglars were sentenced to the penitentiary, there was great rejoicing in Woodville, for the colonel had been a hard master to the mill hands, and Mr.

Tracy, who now took charge, was known to be a kind hearted, liberal man.

On that same day, while Tom Brandon was working on an old bicycle in his little shop, a young man, pale and haggard, dressed in a cheap business suit, walked in.

Tom flung down his hammer and rushed to meet him.

"Oh, Ben!" he cried. "Oh, Ben!"

The young man threw his arm around Tom's neck and kissed him on the cheek.

"My brother! My brother!" he said, brokenly. "Let me stay here with you! Don't send me away, Tom!"

Send him away! As though Tom could dream of such a thing!

The governor of the State had pardoned Ben, for he was convicted of forgery on his own confession; pardoned him on account of the story told by the little red book in which Colonel Todd had made certain entries which showed conclusively that he alone had profited by Ben's crime.

After that the sign over the shop was changed to Brandon Brothers, and side by side, Ben and Tom worked for a year.

They devoted themselves to business and prospered—they are prospering still.

Last summer Tom married Jennie Todd, and Jack Ashman stood up with him, but on the wedding day Ben left the bicycle business and went back to his place in the mill.

Fact was, Mr. Tracy could not get along without him, and he believed, and believed truly that Ben was now a thoroughly reformed man.

On that same day Herman the Hermit was found dead in his bed, and the Brandon boys buried him by their father's side.

For his manly conduct everyone respects Ben. Where another might have sneaked away from the scene of his past disgrace, Ben stayed.

The Buffalo is now the only wheel for Woodville, and somebody is making money rapidly.

It is BEN'S BROTHER THE BRIGHTEST BOY IN TOWN

THE END.

Read "THE PEARL PRINCE; OR, THE SHARK SLAYER'S SECRET," by Capt. Thos. H. Wilson, which will be the next number (649) of "Pluck and Luck."

SPECIAL NOTICE. All back numbers of this weekly except the following are in print: 1 to 25, 27, 29 to 36, 38 to 40, 42, 43, 47 to 51, 53 to 55, 57 to 60, 62, 64, 66 to 69, 71 to 73, 75, 81, 84 to 86, 88, 89, 92 to 94, 99, 100, 102, 105, 107, 109, 110, 116, 119, 124 to 126, 132, 140, 143, 163, 166, 171, 179 to 181, 212, 213, 215, 216, 239, 247, 257, 265, 268, 277. If you cannot obtain the ones you want from any newsdealer, send the price in money or postage stamps by mail to FRANK TOUSEY, PUBLISHER, 24 UNION SQUARE, New York, and you will receive the copies you order by return mail.

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BRIEF, BUT POINTED.

Dr. Murrin, of the Georgetown University Hospital, was called upon recently to treat the first case of snakebite in that vicinity this season. The patient was the baby daughter of Mrs. Sarah Ridgway, who lives on the Canal Road, near Chain Bridge. The child is only two and a half years old and is a deaf mute. It had just stepped off the porch of its home when it grabbed at its foot and began gesticulating. Its mother rushed out and examined the injured foot and discovered the cause of the child's pain and terror. A man who was walking along the canal wall at the time turned sharply when the child shrieked and saw the snake release its hold. He killed it with a stick and threw it into the canal. The snake was a copperhead more than three feet long, which had evidently come up on the road from the river bottom. The child was brought hurriedly to the Georgetown Hospital. No bad effects are anticipated by the doctors, who say that prompt treatment probably saved the child's limb or possibly its life.

A report from Walker Lake, Nev., states that a monster sea serpent has been seen at the northern end of the lake. Dan Cornelison, a mining man of good reputation for veracity, brought the story to Goldfield. Cornelison says that both he and a companion named John McCorry sighted the reptile while fishing from a boat half a mile from the northern shore of the lake. The monster was then making its way toward the east shore of the lake. Cornelison says that at first sight he took the serpent for a man in a skiff, and when it disappeared for a moment he thought the boat had capsized, and rowed toward the spot, when it suddenly reappeared, giving them a good view of its proportions, which they estimated to be about thirty feet in length and six feet across the back. Another resident of that vicinity, a man named Peters, is said to have discovered the serpent some time ago reposing in shallow water near the shore, and on being aroused it disappeared in deeper water. There is also said to be a legend among the Piutes around Shurz concerning the existence of a serpent in Walker Lake.

"A curious freak of nature is the pride of a country neighborhood near Prescott, Ariz.," remarked F. X. Dorgan of El Paso, Tex. "This is called a breathing cave. The cave is in the lava formation on a high tableland near Prescott. In a wall of this cave is a crevice which is probably three inches wide and several feet long. A visitor stands close to this

crack. He feels a current of air rushing out of it. This is not so strange. But if he waits long enough he will notice that the direction of the current has changed, and the air is being drawn into the crevice. The people of the neighborhood have many theories to account for the change in the direction of the air current, but I do not believe that any of them would stand the test of a scientist's examination. A subterranean stream is given as the probable cause. Just how the flow of an underground river could cause the direction of the air current to be reversed I cannot see. However, the crevice is there and the phenomenon exists. I think that some of the people in that neighborhood are just a bit superstitious on the subject of the 'breathing cave.'"

OUR COMIC COLUMN.

Cynic Philosopher—You should be careful to address all men in honeyed speech. Student—Why so? Cynic Philosopher—Because then it will not be so hard on you when you have to eat your words.

Mr. Rooke—I hope you don't believe what they said about me? Miss Budd—I make it a point never to believe more than half I hear. Mr. Rooke—But the trouble is you women generally believe the wrong half.

"I suppose that there are many problems which Polar explorers seek to solve," said the unscientific man. "Yes," replied the intrepid traveler, "a great many." "What is the most important one?" "Getting back."

"Ah," sighed the poetess of passion, in a tense tone, "have you never prayed and hoped for death?" "Many and many a time," replied the petulant young beauty. "But it doesn't seem to be any use. My husband is seventy-five now, and he looks to be good for ten years more, at least."

The steamer landed at the St. Joe dock and the passengers began to disembark. Whereupon the orchestra on the boat struck up Mendelssohn's wedding march. "Wilfred," said the pretty young thing in white, blushing furiously and turning to the young man by her side, "you've told somebody."

M. Rodin, the great French sculptor, is credited with various peculiarities, of which many stories are told in his own country, says London Tit-Bits. One of his eccentricities is a strong objection to be waited on at meals by servants, and, in order to humor her husband, Mme. Rodin usually undertakes this duty herself, especially when guests are invited. One day when M. Rodin was entertaining a few of his artist friends, Mme. Rodin, as usual, played the role of waitress very unobtrusively and effectively. When she had left the room for a few moments one of the guests, to whom the great sculptor's wife was not personally known, said to his host with great earnestness: "I say, Rodin, what can be your reason for allowing that dreadful-looking old woman to prowl about the place? Why don't you get a fresh, good-looking young housekeeper? This one must give you a fit of melancholy every time you look at her." The other guests, who knew the lady, were aghast at this indiscretion; but M. Rodin, recognizing that the remark was made in all innocence, smilingly informed his indiscreet friend that the "dreadful-looking old woman" was his wife, and, by tactfully introducing a discussion on art, set his guests once more at their ease.

A FAITHFUL HINDOO

By Kit Clyde.

It was some twenty years ago, when all the ice that was consumed in the East Indies, save the blocks of snow that were brought down from the peaks of the Himalayas for the use of the wealthy residents of the Upper Country, was carried thither in large vessels sailing from Boston or ports in the State of Maine, that I was clerk in Tudor & Co.'s employ, and stationed at Calcutta.

The trade, which had flourished for more than two decades, and brought millions of dollars into the pockets of the shrewd Americans who ventured in it, met with a sudden and untimely death, for where the merchant and the mariner were wont to furnish this valuable commodity to the dwellers of the Orient, science has stepped in and now manufactured ice is alone found in the market.

It is not of the chemically manufactured crystal that this article treats, but of an adventure which befell me when I was a resident of the Land of the Rajahs.

I had been living in the City of Palaces some two years, and during that time had maintained in my service as a valet a youthful native not more than fifteen years of age, whose name was Bud-Jara-Jaha, though it was only by the first syllable of this harsh-sounding cognomen that the little fellow was ever addressed.

He was indeed an exception to the majority of Indian servants that I had ever known; inasmuch as he was scrupulously honest, truthful and remarkably attentive to the wants of his employer. If he possessed any relatives I was not aware of the fact on engaging him, and was led to suppose that he was alone in the world, until I suddenly awoke to the realization that he owned family connections, and those, too, of the most disreputable class in India.

One morning I found upon my desk a note from the manager, ordering me to prepare to go to Barrakpore at once, a city some two days' journey to the northward, and there take charge of a small branch house which had just been established.

I was rather pleased at the prospect of a change, and turning to Bud, who was ever beside me like a shadow, I said:

"Ah, boy, we are going to take a trip into the country, so you must hasten to my apartments and pack up, for I expect we shall leave here to-day."

To my surprise, I noted a cloud settle over the nut-brown features of the youth, and I inquired:

"What? Are you not glad?"

"If the sahib goes, Bud will follow him," was the reply, "but Calcutta is good, and here the master and the servant are safe."

"Why, Bud?" I asked, quickly, "what danger can there be at Barrakpore which we do not encounter here? Surely it must be a healthy city."

The youth's only answer was a low shake of the head as he turned and passed silently out of the office on his way to gather up my belongings preparatory to making the trip.

During the two hours when I was obliged to wait for the coming of the superintendent to receive further instructions and my credentials, Bud's face haunted me and I tried in vain to fathom the reason of his evident reluctance to leave our present quarters.

However, after meeting my superior, all thoughts of the young native were banished, nor were they again recalled until I met him on the steps of the hotel standing beside the two portmanteaus which contained my wardrobe.

His features now bore the same placid expression with which I was familiar, and concluding that I had been mistaken in the lad's aversion to accompany me, I dismissed the subject.

The youth, anticipating my wishes, had chartered a dinghy to take us up the river and jumping into a ghurry (a carriage) we drove to the ghaut where we embarked and were soon afloat upon the waters of the muddy Hooghly.

As I before stated, it was two days' journey to our destination, and at the end of that time, tired and hungry, we reached the city. I reported to the office of the company at once, after transacting my business with the man whom I was to relieve, and was conducted to the bungalow which was to be our residence, for a short time at least.

There were many servants domiciled in the house whom I thought it as well to retain, as there is little choice in Indian help.

That night, as I was about to retire, Bud grasped my hand, and I saw that tears were standing in his dark, lustrous eyes.

"My boy, what is the matter?" I asked. "You cannot feel so very bad to leave Calcutta?"

"Sahib, sahib!" he exclaimed, earnestly. "Do not sleep to-night. The eyes may close, but the mind must be awake, or when morning comes Bud-Jara-Jaha will look upon the dead face of his master, for the sword of Shiva hangs over the head of the white man."

Ere I could inquire further into his meaning, the lad was gone.

I hurried after him through the adjoining apartments, out of doors into the starlit night and stood upon the veranda, but but he was nowhere to be seen. He had vanished like a spirit.

"Pshaw," I thought, "the boy is homesick, and his unenlightened mind has conjured up visions of danger to me which are not likely to be realized."

I returned to my couch, but despite myself, I could not sleep. I extinguished the night lamp, thinking that darkness would lure the drowsy god to my pillow.

But it was not to be! The earnest, pleading face of Bud was ever before me.

It was perhaps one o'clock in the morning, and I had about made up my mind to light a pipe, and see if it would not have a soothing influence upon my overstrung nerves, when I detected the sound of a footstep in the next room. Soft, stealthily and cat-like, it approached the door of my chamber. Then a slight rustling of the curtains followed, and I felt assured that some intruder was near.

Without making the least noise I reached for and secured my revolver, which was ever placed beneath my pillow. I strained by eyes to catch sight of the nocturnal visitor whom, I knew, meant me no good. Soon I realized that the stranger was at my bedside, and the next instant my head was lifted and I felt a soft cord encircling my throat.

Like a flash I comprehended that I had been selected as a victim to the relentless Goddess Thuggee!

Ere the fatal knot could be tightened, my weapon flashed once, twice, thrice, and a heavy weight fell to the floor.

With trembling hands I struck a match and lighted the lamp.

There, lying at my feet, writhing in the death agony, was a richly dressed native. Jewels sparkled upon the slim, delicate fingers, while in the front of the turban, which had rolled from his head, scintillated a gem which would have proved a fortune to almost any dweller in the Orient.

The household had become alarmed at the pistol shots and servants came hurrying into the room, where with the silken cord still about my neck and the revolver in my hand, I stood contemplating the form of the fanatic who would have been my assassin.

Bud was the last to appear, and when I saw his horror-stricken face in the doorway, where he had paused, holding back the curtain, I motioned him to approach, and bade the others go and notify the nightwatch.

When alone with the boy I asked:

"Bud did you know that man?" indicating the form of my assailant.

"Yes, sahib, he was my mother's brother."

"Were you assured he would seek my life?"

"Your poor slave feared so if you left Calcutta."

"But how did he become aware that I intended to change my place of abode?"

"The disciples of Thuggee never lose sight of those whom they have destined to sacrifice."

"Do you belong to that heinous caste?" I demanded, sternly.

"No, sahib."

"Then how did you learn that I had been selected as a victim? I have always understood that their movements were known only by a chosen few."

"It was by accident, sahib, that I heard my people talking. They hated you, for they feared that some day you would take me to a far-off country, and persuade me to renounce the religion of my fathers."

"You are not a Thug?"

"Not! Yet they say that Bud-Jara-Jaha is a Hindoo and should never become a Christian. I myself would have died by the cord if it was thought that I should follow the teachings of the white man."

I saw how it was. The poor fellow, through his love for me, had risked his life to give the warning, and in so doing had sacrificed one of his own relatives. The lad has been amply repaid, however, for when the excitement attendant upon the attempted assassination had subsided, the faithful youth was given a more lucrative position than that of valet, and although no persuasion could induce him to abandon the religion of his fathers, he had, ere I left India, risen to a station both in business and social circles that might be coveted by the son of the richest European.

THE BEAR WAS A WONDER

"We were running a line along the south side of Shiny Mountain, Pa., several years ago," the old surveyor said, "and we had seated ourselves on some stones to rest, when Levi called my attention to a bear that was clawing for grubs in a rotten stump a few rods below us. We had no desire to disturb the bear, and we decided to sit still and study him as long as he continued to paw in the stump. His tail was toward us when we took our seats, but in a couple of turns around the stump, and upper side of it, leaned his back against the stump, folded his arms, and began to stare at us. We remained perfectly motionless for perhaps five minutes, when seeing that the bear wasn't a bit skittish and that on the contrary, he was inclined to be neighborly, we filled our pipes and went to smoking. The wind blew the smoke toward the bear, and he sniffed at it and seemed to like the odor. There was a lot of round boulders lying near us, and when we had puffed a spell Levi said: 'Major, suppose I roll a stone down toward the bear just to see what he'll do?' The bear was still gazing at us, and I told Levi to go ahead."

"It was pretty steep between us and the bear, and Levi selected a round boulder that probably weighed thirty pounds and started it down the hill. It went straight for the bear, and before it reached him I judged that it had attained a velocity of at least fifteen miles an hour. It looked as though it was going to hit the bear in the stomach, and I expected to

see him skedaddle before it got to him, but he didn't budge an inch. A few feet above the bear the boulder struck a root, bounded in the air, and was making a curve that would have taken it clear over the bear and the stump, when the bear suddenly arose on his tip-toes and caught the flying stone in his paws. The weight of the boulder and the speed it was going staggered the bear a little and turned him slightly toward the left, but it didn't take him off his pins. Holding the stone exactly as he had caught it, the bear looked over his right shoulder at me as though he thought I was the umpire and had got to pass judgment on the catch. Noticing this, I yelled, "Out at first!" and the bear instantly tossed the stone behind the stump, faced about, made a motion as though he was spitting on his paws, and resumed his former attitude on the upper side of the stump.

"Levi lay down and roared and rolled until he was so weak he could hardly stand, and I laughed so long and hard that I got a pain in the stomach. Meanwhile the bear was bracing himself against the stump and glaring at us, and when he had got seated again he stretched his paws toward us as much as to say: 'Send down another one, Levi!' We sat still for a few moments, and the bear became very uneasy. Presently he began to dance back and forth on his hind toes, looking at us all the time, and held up his paws and muttered something that sounded exactly like 'Come, play ball! Play ball!' and backed up against the stump again."

"I saw that the bear wanted to play some more, so I picked up a boulder a little smaller than the one Levi had rolled, and sent it spinning down the hill. The bear saw it start, and he eyed it until it was half way to him, when he raised his paws and watched for the stone to bound in the air. Instead of striking the root, as Levi's boulder had done, my stone jumped over it and hit the bear in the belly. He was all ready to catch the stone on the fly, and when it hit him he dropped like a shot, doubled up in a heap, and went to grunting and rubbing his stomach with his paws. It took the bear nearly half an hour to get rid of the pain, and we were expecting to see him take leg bail as soon as he was able to run, but to our surprise he jumped up all of a sudden, backed up to the stump, and motioned for us to roll another stone down."

"By that time Levi's strength had returned, and I told him to send a hot one to the bear. Levi quickly picked out a perfectly round boulder, almost as big as he could lift, and rolled it to the head of the runway. The stone must have weighed eighty pounds, and while Levi was getting it in line with the stump the bear trembled with eagerness for it to come within reach of his paws. He worked himself up and down on his hind legs, as if to test his joints, clapped his paws together several times, and intently eyed Levi and the boulder. At last Levi started the stone. It made the brush crack, and the bear stood like a statue with his paws outstretched. The boulder struck the root and bounded high. The bear caught it, and the next second his hind feet flew from under him and he was carried headlong over the stump. It was too hot a ball for the bear to hold, and when he let go of it he was plowing the brush with his back some distance below the stump. When he picked himself up the boulder was at the foot of the hill. The bear had got all the ball playing he wanted for that day, and as soon as he had time to see how the land lay he went bellowing towards the woods as though a pail of boiling tar was sticking to his fur."

Terrapin being truly the dish of the aristocrats of America, it seems difficult to realize, says What to Eat, that terrapin were once so plentiful that slave holders around Chesapeake Bay had to be prohibited by law from inflicting them upon their bondmen more than three times a week, on the ground of cruelty.

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